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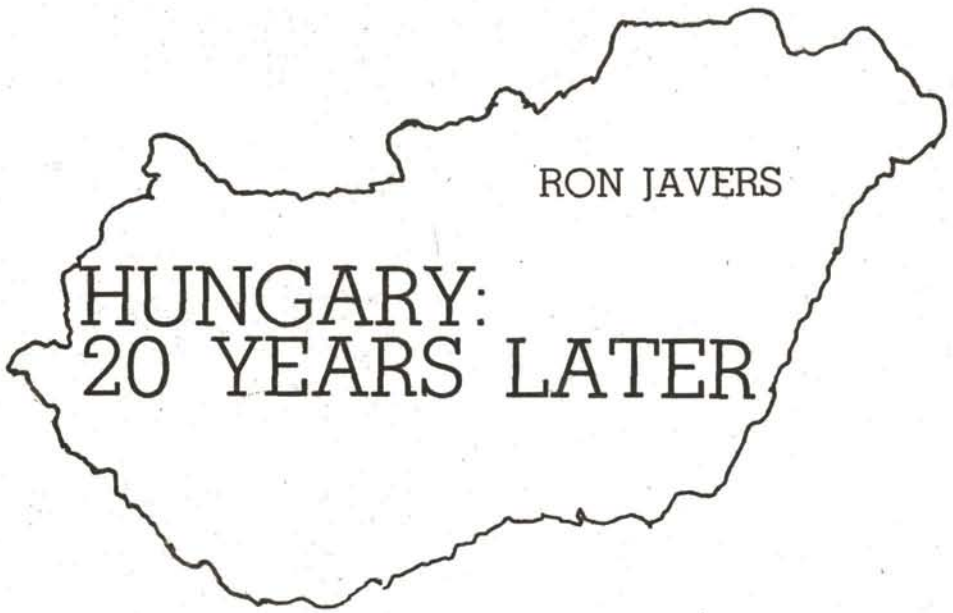

Fall Book Issue

GENE H. BELL
FANTASY, HISTORY AND THE NEW FICTION

AFTER CHRISTIANITY, WHAT? GERALD J. GALGAN

ELECTING THE MESSIAH JOHN GARVEY

OF ELIOT AND POUND [illegible] GROTH

CHARLES DAVIS on HARTFORD
STEVEN KROLL on JUDITH GUES

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NEWS & VIEWS

Parish Contentions

Good Shepherd parish in Mt. Vernon, Va., which has been engaged in a running dispute with pastor and bishop over the functioning of a parish council [*Commonweal*, 2/28/75], has had its case taken on by Rome.

In a move believed to be without precedent for an American congregation, the Vatican has ordered the two-year dispute submitted to arbitration. Bishop Joseph H. Hodges of Wheeling-Charleston, W. Va., has been named as arbitrator by the head of the Vatican's Congregation for the Clergy, Cardinal Wright.

According to Religious News Service, the "Good Shepherd complaint took on considerable significance as a result of the Vatican action, indicating among other things Vatican concern for due process in the two-year-old Diocese of Arlington."

The Good Shepherd controversy has dogged the diocese almost every minute of its existence. Essentially at stake, as one parishioner phrased it, is whether the congregation may exercise a co-responsibility with its clergy in the ministry of the parish.

No time framework has been established for implementing and completing arbitration.

So that's one American way of resolving a dispute between parish and rectory and chancery: Appeal to delegated authority, invoke the letter of Vatican Council II, then sit down and discuss grievances.

In Italy, upset Catholics prefer the direct-action method—thus the number of "occupied" churches there grew from two to five over the summer.

How do you occupy a church? Easy. Just move in and defy authorities to deny you your "rights." There are no Vatican II niceties involved, just the centuries-old principle of sanctuary.

Italian church officials have been contending with parishioners of Holy Heart parish in Lavello and St. Rocco parish in Gioiosa Ionica, both in Southern Italy, for three and two years, respectively. Now they are confronted with occupations in Favara, an economically depressed community of 25,000 persons in Sicily; Gorizia, a town of 43,000 in Northern Italy's earthquake zone; and Imola, a city near Bologna.

In Favara, the issue was joined when Bishop Giuseppe Petralia accused the two priests of SS. Peter and Paul parish of dispensing "Marxist propaganda," and suspended them. Parishioners held an assembly and informed the bishop that either the suspension was to be retracted or the church would be occupied. The church was occupied. Meanwhile, the two priests continue their ministry to the parish and their efforts to solve the social problems of the town.

In Gorizia, Father Alberto De Nadai was ordered by his bishop to leave his parish "for the good of his and their souls." Parishioners asked De Nadai to stay; the priest agreed. On Sept. 14, more than 1,000 parishioners went to see the bishop. He refused to meet with them. They firmed up an occupation.

In Imola, parishioners of St. John's Church had been in tension with Bishop Luigi Dardani over the nation's referendum on civil divorce. Then in June, the parish priest, Father Cleto Zaniboni, 39, went ahead and married a 35-year-old school teacher. Parishioners had debated the prospective marriage for months, and had decided that they wanted their pastor to stay, marriage or no marriage. He agreed. The bishop sicked the police. Parishioners occupied the church.

Citations

Who's Who in America is not the type book that one ordinarily pages through. You reach for it, hope the truss will hold the hernia, check a name, then wrestle the book back onto the shelf.

For no particular reason we were paging through the 1974-75 edition the other day, and discovered that up front—after table of contents, advisors and such standard data—*Who's Who* singles out a select few for what it calls Citations for Significant Contribution to Society. It's a relatively new feature, being done only for the sixth time. An interesting idea, and an interesting list.

The 1974-75 edition cites 14, among them Hank Aaron, Marian Anderson, Cass Canfield, James Thomas Flexner, Katharine Graham —and Dorothy Day. The Day citation:

"Newspaper woman, author, editor, publisher, a socialist, syndicalist, and anarchist, Dorothy Day has been acclaimed not only as 'the most influential lay person in the history of American Catholicism,' but also as a 'radical who never got tired.' Dorothy Day began working among the poor in the early 1920s and has lived in voluntary poverty throughout her adult life. Co-founder of *The Catholic Worker* and the Catholic Worker Movement, co-founder of New York's St. Joseph's House of Hospitality (and many other houses and farms for the poor and homeless), this saintly and heroic woman has been an inspiration to the many who have encountered her immense courage."

A lovely tribute to one who is most deserving.

There was another equally meritorious but, as it turned out, extremely poignant tribute. This was to Anne Sexton, the poet.

"One special quality of her verse is an ability to express that knowledge women know as women," said the citation. ". . . Her poetry is classified by most critics as 'confessional' verse. She herself has said, 'My themes deal with life and death, insanity, daughterhood, motherhood and love. My poems are intensely physical.' "

Anne Sexton, 1967 Pulitzer Prize winner, since died a suicide.

Santa Maria!

If you were running a journalism class, what mark would you give a student who stretched for his lead?

"Exactly 484 years after Columbus discovered America, postseason baseball rediscovered Yankee Stadium last night as the Kansas City Royals clashed with the Yankees in Game No. 3 of the American League pennant playoffs."

Who committed it? Murray Chass in the *New York Times*.

Odds and Ends

—"I've never lost a night's sleep over the fact that I commanded the [Hiroshima] bombing; the gray hairs I've got now come from the pressures of business," said Paul W. Tibbetts, pilot of the Enola Gay, which dropped the A-bomb Aug. 6, 1945. Then, with the light step of a Strangelove, Tibbetts climbed into the pilot's seat of the last B-29 in flying condition and flew it over a crowd of 18,000 at the air show of the Confederate Air Force at Harlingen, Texas. Demonstrating that he hadn't lost the old touch, Tibbetts strained and the plane dropped a simulated A-bomb, sending skyward a billowing mushroom-shaped cloud. The crowd cheered. . . . And maybe Harry Truman turned in his grave. JOHN DEEDY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Books, Critics

Belvedere, Calif.

To the Editors: Of all the reviews of my book, *John Maher of Delancey Street*, Carlo Weber's (*Commonweal*, Sept. 10) was by far the most perceptive, and one of the very few that made sense.

Most reviews either quoted from the jacket, or displayed such off-the-wall hostility and misinformation as to reinforce my conviction that American book critics, as a rule, do not read the books they review.

Weber stands alone in grasping the simple but essential distinction between Delancey Street and its parent group, Synanon, a difference summed up by John Maher's tribute to his teacher and Synanon's founder, Chuck Dederich: "Dederich impressed me because he took no money."

Weber is also unique in his refusal to lapse into the comfortable but misleading pigeon-holing of Maher as a "guru."

My thanks to *Commonweal* for treating this ground-breaking social movement and its charismatic founder with the seriousness they both deserve.

GROVER SALES

India

Brooklyn, N.Y.

To the Editors: Thomas Powers' article on "Indira's India" [Aug. 27] was thought-provoking, if not downright frightening. His paraphrase of the current political stance—

"Without firm guidance there is only pandemonium, a perpetual 'me-first' shoving match."

reminded me of conditions in N.Y.C.

I suggest this time technology, not any political ideology, is the god that's failing. Its practitioners have measurably improved the quality of material life, not at the expense of, but at the total sacrifice of (I hesitate to use the word the spiritual life of man.

LORETTA LOMBARDO

NEWS & VIEWS: 706 **CORRESPONDENCE: 707**
EDITORIAL: 707
WASHINGTON REPORT: The Great Roll-Back: *Frank Getlein* **708**
'MY TASK IS TO BE ALIVE': *Abigail McCarthy* **710**
HUNGARY: TWENTY YEARS LATER: *Ron Javers* **711**
THE SCREEN: *Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr.* **717**
FANTASY, HISTORY AND THE NEW FICTION: *Gene H. Bell* **718**
AFTER CHRISTIANITY, WHAT? *Gerald J. Galgan* **723**
OF ELIOT AND POUND: *Janet Groth* **726**
ELECTING THE MESSIAH: *John Garvey* **730**
BOOKS: *Steven Kroll, Charles Davis* **732**

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A PRESIDENTIAL DOVE?

Looking back over the campaign before the results of the voting are known, it seems to us one of the more refreshing things to take place occurred very early: the booing of Jimmy Carter by the American Legion conventioners over the amnesty issue. It is idle dreaming, perhaps, but we can't help thinking what a wonderful thing it would be if both major presidential candidates were scorned by the various superpatriotic organizations because of their stance on U.S. military policy. With the Pentagon reported ready to ask the White House for $130 billion for the 1978 fiscal year—$9 billion more than the estimate of only seven months ago—and with the international armaments race defying rationality, it would be good to have a dove instead of a hawk in the White House, or as close to one as we can get in current politics.

It is not only nuclear weapons that threaten to escape human control; it is conventional arms as well, and here the United States is a big offender. This country is the Third World's major arms supplier; indeed, although the USSR is a big arms merchant, the U.S. has sold more weapons abroad than all other nations combined. Sharp escalation in this traffic of death has taken place in recent years; U.S. trade in conventional arms which ran around $1 billion annually five years ago has reached $10 billion in each of the last three years. A recent staff study of a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee chaired by Senator Hubert H. Humphrey illustrates the mindless character of many of these sales.

"Out of control" is how Senator Humphrey described our arms deals with Iran. Strangely enough, the entire traffic seems to have begun without approval by the State Department and contrary to a Pentagon recommendation. Ironically, then-President Nixon stopped in Iran after concluding the first nuclear arms limitation with Moscow and gave the Shah of Iran the green light to buy almost anything he wanted in the way of arms, apparently without consultation with his experts. Today Iran is the

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largest single purchaser of U.S. military equipment. Sales between 1972 and 1976 of arms and arms-related material and construction amounted to more than $10 billion. Furthermore, according to Secretary Kissinger, Iran plans $10 billion more of such spending from the U.S. from 1975 to 1980. Purchases already include some of the most advanced weapons systems known, requiring extended instruction and training by U.S. personnel.

For example, Iran has bought 80 of the newest F-14 fighter planes which are themselves complex and which come equipped with very complicated, computer-guided Phoenix missiles. In addition, late in August it was announced in Washington that the Shah plans to buy 100 of the even more advanced F-16 fighters at an additional cost of $3.4 billion, in addition to the $10 billions already committed for other items. Iran, it should be emphasized, is not a technologically advanced country, and more than half its population is illiterate. To train Iranians to handle such complicated weapons systems, thousands of Americans and their dependents are already in Iran; by 1980 their number is expected to reach 50,000 or more. We know what the presence of such "instructors" in Vietnam led to; why should a potential war involving Iran be any different? The recent killing of three Americans by anti-Shah terrorists is one small example of the sort of thing that can be expected to happen.

Some kind of case can be made for helping Iran, of course. Long friendly to the U.S., that country borders on the Soviet Union and is also bordered by Soviet-backed Iraq. In addition, Iran is one of the newly-popular oil states. Nevertheless, the amount of U.S. help that is being provided—for cold cash, naturally, cash earned by raising the price of oil—involves potentially deadly peril for this country and a possible upset to a precarious Middle Eastern peace.

Both in the Persian Gulf area and in the territory of the Israeli-Arab confrontation, the Middle East is a highly volatile and dangerous region. One thing it does not need is for the United States to pump more arms into the area indiscriminately. On this point we should listen to former Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan. In a recent interview with the A.P. he urged the U.S. to reduce military aid to Israel, de-escalate the Middle East arms race and work for a new Arab-Israeli agreement to end the formal state of war. "There must be a way to coming down the hill, of de-escalating," Dayan said. "The only solution is . . . not to give us more arms for our security but to give us more security so we can have less arms. If I could go to America and make a suggestion, I would say: Cut the billions [of dollars] and provide us with an end-of-the-war commitment from Egypt."

Dayan's comments have wider relevance, and his words apply to many other areas of the world as well as to the entire Middle East. Somehow the madness of the arms race, nuclear and conventional, must be contained, if we are to have any kind of human future. Whoever is elected president on Nov. 2, let us hope he understands that fact.

WASHINGTON REPORT

THE GREAT ROLL-BACK

In the second of the "debates," as those television shows of the two major party presidential candidates were mysteriously called, President Ford startled the nation and the world by declaring forthrightly that there was no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and would be none so long as a Ford administration remained in power. Max Frankel of the *Times*, sharing the disbelief of all who were still awake and watching, offered Ford a chance to back away from that one and Ford refused, declaring boldly once more that the Soviets had nothing to do with the management of Poland, Rumania and Yugoslavia, to mention three, and again implying that this felicitous state of independence was largely due to the fear or respect inspired in the Kremlin by the firmness of the Fords.

On the following day a number of things happened as a result of the President's various bold assertions in the "debate." For one thing, the Commerce Department speedily issued a correction: No, they were not going to publish the names of American corporations which had complied with the Arab boycott of companies doing business with Israel or having Jewish employees above the rank of janitor. If you heard the President say that Commerce was going to publish such a list, you mis-heard him; what he obviously said was that Commerce would reveal the names of any American firms that so complied in the future. Pay attention, for heaven's sake.

The second reaction was in Portugal, where left and right were united for the first time in response to Ford's claiming credit for keeping Portugal from going Communist last year. The Portuguese Communists correctly pointed out that the statement could only be an admission that the CIA had been manipulating Portuguese politics, something the Communists suspected all along but couldn't prove until the American President bragged about it. Whether the manipulation consisted of the classic Kissingerian "destabilization," as in Chile, or employed more direct means—or indeed whether such manipulation took place at all outside the President's

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fevered imagination—has yet to be disclosed.

But the third presidential boner, the one about the proud independence and autonomy of Eastern Europe, took several days and quite a considerable amount of public pressure (plus we know not how much private pressure starting, presumably, with Kissinger) to get corrected. Only with extreme reluctance, a step at a time over several days and in the face of an open revolt by the ethnics he considered his own, did Ford finally and rather grudgingly concede that the statement as it stood meant what everybody took it to mean and was, on its face, absurd.

Why the reluctance to correct? Why the statement in the first place? Why the strongly stated repetition? Does Ford acually believe that Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany are independent of the Soviet Union? Does he think that anything he says twice is true?

The last suggestion is probably closer to the truth than the other. Surely even Ford is aware that there is a Soviet presence in all the Communist countries from the Baltic to the Black Sea—though not to the Adriatic—and that that presence is the determining element in all foreign policy and much domestic policy in the area. The presidential denial of that obvious fact was a fascinating playing out of a ploy first introduced into our political life by Ford's master and creator, Richard Nixon.

Nixon did not invent American anti-Communism as a substitute for serious thought about the world and this country's place in it. He did recognize the unlimited personal opportunity that thought-surrogate presented and seized it more firmly and to better advantage than any of his fellow-opportunists in the game, Joe McCarthy, J. Parnell Thomas, Tom Dodd, the whole shabby crew. In the process of seizing that main chance, Nixon gave American anti-Communism a curious twist which is precisely what Ford the other night, after all these years, was responding to.

While he was slavering and howling his way into the vice-presidency, Nixon at one point denounced Dean Acheson's policy of the "containment" of Communism as "cowardly." Nixon asserted that his and Eisenhower's policy would be quite different: it would be a policy of "roll-back" of the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. Needless to say, no such "roll-back" ever took place, was probably never seriously contemplated by anyone, even Nixon. What it was meant to accomplish, it did accomplish, namely the conning of what was not yet called the ethnic vote in the working class districts of the Great Lakes crescent.

Once formulated, however, the idea of the Great Roll-back became part of our general anti-Communist mythology, along with the notion, also heavily promoted by Nixon, that Mao's China was the creature and total dependency of the Soviet Union. It was entirely appropriate that Nixon himself should have been the President to whom the Chinese presented their suggestions for an historic revision of our relations, for it was he more than most American public figures who had warped those relations from the beginning. No such rectification has ever taken place in Nixon's other major contributon to American foreign policy, however. The Great Roll-back has never been rolled back itself. Ford's imaginary view of the way things are from Poland to Rumania corresponded exactly to the early Nixonian imaginary view of what America could or would do about things over there. Nixon fantasized that he would roll back the Russians. Ford, right out in the open on television, fantasized that he and Nixon between them actually had worked the roll-back.

Actually, there is much to be said for the imaginary roll-back as policy. If we have rolled back the Russians, there remains no earthly reason for continuing to bankrupt ourselves and our client-states devoting so much of our national genius to the devising, accumulation and distribution of ever more ingenious and costly systems of arms. If the Russians are no longer in Eastern Europe, we ought seriously to question what it is we think we are doing in Western Europe. If the Russians no longer occupy their Germany—at a profit—perhaps we can stop occupying our Germany—at a loss.

Needless to say, none of those questions was raised by Ford's "opponent" in the "debate," nor are they likely to be. What the two contenders were contending in that meeting was which of them could be counted upon more securely to keep the country in the hands of the Pentagon. Candidate Carter has indeed come out against "waste" in the military, but no one so far has come out in favor of waste, though a quite decent case could be made for it: a niggling concern with pennies saved can easily lead to missing the central point of policy, strict cost-accounting would never have bankrolled the discovery of America or our trip to the moon, and so on in that style for several pages, no trick. In the public perception, economy for the military means making the Pentagon generals pay, say, four dollars for the eight-dollar steaks they now get in their mess for seventy-five cents. Well, there is something to be said for that, no doubt, but it has absolutely nothing to do with the serious reevaluation of the place of arms in our economy and our foreign policy that is most urgently needed.

To intrude a personal note, for which I apologize, that reevaluation is what Eugene McCarthy had in mind when he designated this writer as interim Secretary of Defense in his prospective Cabinet, a designation otherwise baffling, even whimsical to many who heard about it. As far as I know, McCarthy is the only American remotely near the presidency who is even able to conceive the problem, let alone attempt to solve it.

FRANK GETLEIN

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MY TASK IS TO BE ALIVE

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

I KNOW that our American funeral customs and the industry they support are to be deplored. Yet, like most people I have had reason to be grateful for them. They are what we have. And when we come face to face with horror and the inadmissible, they give us the refuge of the expected and the usual.

Washington has many funeral "homes." Some of them are established family businesses which have served certain groups and neighborhoods for several generations. One of these—much advertised and smoothly run—is more frequently used than any other by the bereaved families of our transient officialdom. It is a large brick pseudo-Colonial building on a corner with semi-circular drives and entrances on each street—clearly a busy place.

When there is a death, notices of the "hours of visitation" are placed in the obituary columns of the local dailies, as is the custom. On the last Friday and Saturday in September they were, we read, to be from 2 to 8 p.m. My daughter and I, having learned from experience that the evening hours are the more traditional, arrived at 7.

Suites of viewing rooms and parlors are appointed to each person being mourned. Since there are two floors of such suites, one is met by a receptionist, who greets visitors in a pleasant, quiet tone, and directs them to the correct one. (Some years ago the receptionist used to be clad in black, sometimes relieved with a short string of pearls. In this time of changing mores this is no longer thought necessary. That night she wore a print silk and a long red stole. I thought the latter strangely appropriate.)

We entered the softly-lighted room where the casket was placed and signed the book open on a desk just inside the entrance. We all know the importance of "the book." One may miss seeing the family and thus the opportunity to convey the consolation so important in village or city—one's witness to the fact that a person has lived, has been held in respect, and that his or her leaving does not go unremarked. Your presence says that it is important that this one person has lived and died. So you sign the book. Later anyone may look and see that signature—so much your own that it can be picked out from millions and millions of others—and know that you were there, that you came. That seemed especially important that Saturday, a means of witness, perhaps even of defiance.

Beside the book were the remembrance cards. They were traditional, too,—almost anachronistic—colored pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with his hand raised in blessing. On the back, comforting phrases, "Blessed are they that mourn . . ." and a prayer, "O Gentlest Heart of Jesus . . . have mercy on the soul of Thy departed servant. . ." I wondered what some of the visitors from other cultures now filtering in, looking ill at ease, made of it. There was only one date . . . September 21, 1976.

I spoke to a friend of the family who went to tell the newly-made widow that we were there. She came in. We embraced and murmured the words, the time-worn words, the only words there are in the face of sudden death for one too young. Then she took us to the coffin adorned with only one or two blood-red roses. We knelt and prayed beside the body of a man, a man his friends called "warm," "urbane," "civilized"—a man alive with purpose and plans only 48 hours before. Because I was expected to, I looked at the composed face of the man lying there. And I still could not believe that Orlando Letelier, a man I knew, had been murdered by a bomb—a very sophisticated bomb, the experts had said. And that a young woman who worked in the institute where my daughter spent a college summer had died beside him. In the normal going-to-work traffic of early morning Washington. Only a few blocks from our house. Our world rocked as the terror-makers intended it to do.

I could only look quickly and turn away thinking, "It is true then. His hair did turn grey in that place." I had not seen him since his release from the Chilean concentration camp maintained on a sub-arctic island by the present junta. He had meant to write about that. Only his notes survive.

"There is a kind of total irrationality in what's taking place in those places," he said in an interview. "It is not only the forced work we had to do on the island . . . where the winds blow more than 90 miles an hour—with no proper food or clothing. But (it is also) the acts done in order to intimidate you, to destroy you not only physically but from the psychological point of view. . . On many occasions we were taken out to be executed, and there was a simulation of an execution."

Who killed him? Those who worked with him, including the husband of Ronni Moffit murdered with him, think it must have been a DINA agent, one of the junta's secret police. Certainly he was the leader and the most important of the Chilean political exiles, always excepting Mrs. Allende, widow of the former president. If it was such an an agent the intent would be to con-

(Continued on page 735)

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HUNGARY: TWENTY YEARS LATER

RON JAVERS

Probably the 'freest' of the Communist states adjacent to Russia

When the city of Budapest was mentioned not long ago at a fashionable Philadelphia Main Line cocktail party, a middle-aged lady in a proper tweed suit, wife of a very proper capitalist banker, began to gush.

"Oh, what a delightful city! We discovered it three years ago. Before that we had always spent several weeks each spring in Paris where my son was in school. But the year he was graduated he insisted on showing us Budapest—he had been there on holiday with school chums—and we've been going back ever since. The city is gorgeous, not spoiled like Paris and London. And the people are so nice and friendly. Why, one would hardly imagine they were Communists at all!"

Another heart subverted. Budapest has a way of doing that.

In 1956, the year Soviet tanks rolled into Budapest and over the popular uprising in Hungary, Dwight D. Eisenhower was President. Television was in its infancy. Elvis Presley and a vaguely subversive new music, Rock 'n' roll, were sweeping America. Valiant cold warriors, led by Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were battling the International Communist Conspiracy.

I was nine years old. I remember the air raid drills which were a regular part of the elementary school curriculum in 1956. While teachers painted horrid pictures of the atomic radiation, world-enveloping mushroom clouds and nuclear firestorms. "The Russians" planned to unleash upon America, we children huddled beneath our wooden desks tensely awaiting the all-clear signal that would send us back to Arithmetic or out to recess while The Russians and Atheistic Communists retreated once more, vague threats on our developing political consciousnesses.

That those little wooden desks were no protection at all against a nuclear attack was never a consideration. Just as we never dreamed in our most ambitious and childlike dreams that in fewer than 20 years cold war would be replaced by détente as Richard Nixon journeyed to Moscow to sip vodka and proffer hopes for peace with the recently dismantled Red Menace.

In 1976, the tanks are gone, but Soviet troops remain in Hungary, closeted in their camps to be sure, and maintaining as low a profile as troops anywhere can, but present. Yet little else in Hungary is the same as it was in 1956.

In the Seventies, while the eyes of both the Americans and the Soviets have been riveted on the emerging Communist parties in Western Europe, the countries of Eastern Europe have been quietly pursuing their own brands of Marxism. American press reports from Eastern Europe have been scarce, concentrated mainly on the flare-ups such as Czechoslovakia experienced in 1968. Press accounts from the "satellites" have tended to follow a pattern developed in the cold war when access was more limited and correspondents pretended to report what was really going on by scrutinizing the seating order of party officials at public functions and interviewing occasional defectors. American reporting on Communist states, until very recently, has concerned itself almost entirely with classical "Kremlinology," concentrating on power struggles and personalities rather than on the dynamics of the individual societies, issues and emerging trends.

RON JAVERS *studied East European Affairs at Harvard last year as a Nieman Fellow. Before that, he was Editorial Page Editor at the* Philadelphia Daily News. *He recently returned from an extended trip through Europe.*

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In the academic world things have not been much better. It is not insignificant that almost 20 years after its original publication, Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Soviet Bloc* remains the standard American college text on East European affairs. A conservative tendency on the part of many American East European scholars, many of whom are émigrés, has not gone unremarked.

Most U.S. colleges, in fact, have no department of East European studies. Students wishing to pursue courses in the area quickly learn to look under "Russian Studies" in their catalogues. A Hungarian exchange student tells the story of his amazement upon discovering "Hungary" filed under "Austria" in stacks of Harvard's Widener Library, an anachronistic salute to the days of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

"But at least we aren't yet filed under 'Russia' at Harvard," the student adds wryly. "That seems to be where the American State Department has us."

His reference is to a widely reported "private" remark of State Department Counselor Helmut Sonnenfeldt last December that U.S. policy would respond to "the clearly visible aspirations in Eastern Europe for a more autonomous existence within the context of a strong Soviet geopolitical influence" and "a more natural and organic" Soviet-East European relationship." After a firestorm of criticism, Sonnenfeldt withdrew the word "organic," the hackles of Americans of East European origin being too sensitive in this election year.

Americans tend to see Hungary—when they see her at all—as either an enslaved nation of Molotov-cocktail-bearing Freedom Fighters or a romantic little backwater of colorful Gypsies all playing the same monotonous fiddle tune. On a recent visit to a Midwest university, one Hungarian journalist interviewed 30 American families and found their hospitality uniformly gracious and their knowledge of Hungary uniformly appalling. "Of 30 families," he says, "seven or eight were completely unaware that Hungary is a Communist country. The others all asked the standard questions: 'Are the churches open? Do Communists really want to enslave the world?' That kind of thing. I found the university professors equally uninformed. You American journalists brag about freedom of information. In no European country—East or West—are the people so badly informed."

This view of the Ignorant American was reflected by other Hungarians I spoke with. Yet Hungarians, both officials and private citizens, displayed a wealth of knowledge of American affairs. Everywhere I visited—factories, cooperative farms, private homes—the first question was the same: "What about crime in America? Is it really so dangerous in the cities?" Equally common were questions about Teddy Kennedy, (Would people forget about Chappaquiddick by the time of the 1980 presidential elections), Jimmy Carter, and the Viking landing on Mars.

Today, most Western observers and Hungarians themselves agree that Hungary is probably the "freest" of the Communist states sharing a border with the Soviet Union. In 1960, only a half million citizens of other countries crossed Hungary's slowly opening borders. This year Hungarian officials say the number will top six million.

János Kádar, the party first secretary, who came to power on the backs of Russian tanks in 1956, has been moving the country slowly along the narrow path between the people's hearty nationalism and increasing pressure for "the good life," and the reality of Soviet expectations for "correct" Communist behavior in neighboring Warsaw Pact countries. Kadar's present popularity—and he is probably more popular among non-Communists than among his own party members—is a phenomenon Hungarians themselves are still trying to understand.

Terrible bitterness lingered after the events of 1956. Initially, Kadar was perceived as a quisling, responsible for the sellout of the revolution and for the execution of Imre Nagy, his fellow Communist who somewhat reluctantly came to preside over the uprising. It was Nagy who on Nov. 1, 1956 dropped the biggest Molotov cocktail in the face of the Soviets, withdrawing Hungary from the Warsaw Pact and proclaiming neutrality. Three days later, Russian troops attacked Budapest. Kadar, meanwhile, had fled the city to form an all-Communist government in concert with the Soviets. Defeated by the Russian troops, Nagy and a group of supporters took sanctuary in the Yugoslav embassy. Only Kadar's repeated public assurance of full amnesty persuaded Nagy and his group to leave the protection of the embassy on Nov. 3, 1956. They were immediately abducted by Soviet authorities and taken to Rumania. On June 17, 1958, the Hungarian government announced the execution of Nagy and three of his top supporters, along with heavy prison terms for a half dozen others.

Twenty years later many Hungarians seem to have forgiven or at least forgotten Kadar's apparent treachery. I asked one prominent party journalist, a former politician, how Kadar could have assured Nagy amnesty and then permitted his execution.

"That still comes up among Hungarian close friends discussing past events," the journalist told me. "But it seems to come up less and less frequently as the years go by. From '56 to '58 the play was completely in Russian hands. There was no way they would have permitted Nagy to survive. Kadar did what he had to. That's what many believe, or choose to believe. It's difficult to be really certain."

"The average Hungarian today," the journalist added, "is a hardheaded political realist, very pragmatic. He has learned his lessons the hard way."

Such was the sentiment I heard repeated again and again everywhere in Hungary. Kadar, who was himself imprisoned in a 1951 purge, has gained acceptance and

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even grudging popularity among Hungarian non-Communists because he didn't continue a bloodbath after the uprising. Certainly there were executions and jail terms—no one knows for sure how many—but by January 1959 the Kadar government announced the end of trials for participation in the uprising. By November 1962, in a brilliant political stroke, Kádar had reversed the old stalinist line, creating a new slogan: "Whoever is not against us is with us." This doctrine provided great changes in the lives of millions of Hungary's non-Communists, opening the way for at least limited participation in national life. Non-Communists were appointed to jobs formerly reserved for party members. The universities were opened to all and the whole country began to breathe more easily.

Hungarians today are not so much questioning Kadar's seamy rise to the top as hoping that he stays there. At 64, he has been reported ailing and the question of his successor is one many Hungarians would rather avoid. Mentioned most often privately among those close to the government are Béla Biscku, now secretary of the party central committee, and Gyorgy Lazar, president of the ministerial council.

"I wish Kádar a long life," one middle-aged professional man told me. "Because after him there's a question mark. I hope there won't be a change for the worse, but I'm not expecting anything radically better either."

Kadar's political success stems in large part from his economic success. Economic development has not been spectacular or without problems, but it has been steady. Traditionally poor in natural resources, Hungary relies heavily—to the tune of more than 40 percent of its national income—on foreign trade. Although two-thirds of that trade is with the countries of Comecon, the Communist Common Market, Kadar is quite interested in enlarging trade with the West.

Hungary's desire for "most-favored nation" status in her trade relations with the U.S.—a development which would reduce present prohibitory tariffs—remains hostage in Congress to the Soviets' status, tied up in the debate over free emigration for dissidents.

Trade is economic life for Hungary; each 1 percent increase in the national income requires a 1.8 percent increase in foreign trade. In the 10 years from 1960 to 1970, Kadar's government managed to double the total value of all trade, materially improving the national standard of living and its own image within the country.

* * *

On the way to visit the Budapest plant of the United Incandescent Lamp and Electrical Co., one of the world's largest bulb makers, I tell my guide that I am certain this will be one of the bright spots in the Hungarian economy. Being something of a foot soldier in the long march of Hungarian socialist transformation, he doesn't get the joke.

But Laszlo Teke appreciates the pun immediately. Teke has been around. At 42, the graying, sardonic executive is one of Hungary's top businessmen, employing some 32,000 people. Eighty percent of his firm's sales are in exports and Teke spends half of each year abroad on business. With degrees in economics and engineering and fluency in four languages. Teke is one of a growing number of semi-independent executives whose talents have flowered since the introduction in 1968 of Hungary's New Economic Mechanism.

The 1968 reform was designed to let market forces play a larger role in the planned economy, allowing managers a greater degree of freedom in charting the courses of their companies. Going far beyond the cautious decentralization of the Soviets, it provided profit sharing, merit raises and other direct incentives to workers.

Laszlo Teke doesn't sound terribly different from most American executives when he says, "Frankly, my duty is to make as much profit for my company as I can." Just 10 years ago, such talk would have been heresy in Communist Hungary. Today, more and more managers, especially the most successful ones, are speaking cautiously in terms of profits, competition and market conditions.

Traditional Western analysts, often wishfully it seems, view such economic liberation as a return to capitalism. More accurately, the liberalization reflects a return to realism, and the growing sophistication of Hungary's Marxist planners. The means of production remain firmly in the hands of the state, where the party intends to keep them. All liberalization in Hungary—democratic, social and economic—must be viewed in that context.

The Hungarian economy suffers a shortage of semi- and unskilled laborers and a surplus of white-collar workers, a problem just the reverse of that of most industrialized nations. Earlier five-year plans sought to create employment. The present glut of administrators and managers forced a government hiring-freeze on white-collar positions. Many factories have been directed to transfer nonproductive administrators into the ranks of physical workers, a shuffling fraught with political tension.

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The other large problem economic planners face is prices. Prices of many basic commodities—meat, sugar, dairy products, children's clothing—were held down artificially while production costs continued to increase. Planners now are trying to reconcile necessary price increases—like last year's 50 percent hike in sugar prices and this summer's 33 to 40 percent boost in meat prices—with the public's natural resistance to paying more at the market. The government fears that public opinion if not tempered could become a source of popular unrest as it did in neighboring Poland this summer when Edward Gierek's government was forced to rescind massive food-price increases after workers rioted. The Hungarians thus far have avoided trouble by coupling their price boosts with a large "public information" effort and with monthly cash family allotments designed to soften the effects of the increases.

* * *

"It's not exactly Southern California, but we Hungarians enjoy it anyway." The young government worker is referring to Lake Balaton, the largest lake in central Europe and Hungary's favorite playground. Each summer weekend crowds jam the newly completed M-7 highway for the two-hour drive from Budapest to any one of the dozens of tiny resort towns strung out around the lake.

"The Balaton" is a ritual for Hungarians and it's fast becoming the same thing for thousands of non-Hungarian tourists, mainly from neighboring Communist states, but from Western Europe as well. Because of tight currency exchange regulations designed to keep Western hard currencies flowing into Communist nations and very little flowing out, it's difficult for East Europeans to vacation in the West. In Hungary, the difficulties are mainly in expense (a would-be vacationer must buy his dollars or francs or marks from the government at high rates) and red tape. In other Communist countries, particularly East Germany, the borders to the West remain effectively closed for tourists. That's why more and more Poles, Czechs and East Germans are flocking to The Balaton. Things are getting so crowded that the government recently banned motor boats from the lake in order to cut pollution. Balaton is a notorious meeting spot for East and West Germans, families and friends who live on different sides of the border and who otherwise would have no opportunity to meet in such relaxed surroundings.

* * *

There is good music and bad music today in the land of Bartók, Liszt and Kodály. This night the music is bad—ancient 'Fifties imports from the U.S. The five-piece combo in the little Balaton resort club is struggling its way through "Tutti Frutti." The music is dated and slightly off key, yet for the dozens of young Hungarians, Poles, Czechs and Germans undulating on the tiny dance floor the feeling is definitely "all rooti." In the West such music would be labeled nostalgic or campy, but these sweating, gyrating kids seem unaware of that. Their dancing is as frenzied as any you'd find at a European disco. But there's a certain added athletic quality about it, a slightly primitive insistence.

At one table three Poles and three Hungarians are competing to see who can buy more of the excellent local $2.40-a-bottle white wine. They are joined by an East German couple. No one speaks the other's language well, the *lingua franca* being broken German. Soon the laughing group begins proposing toasts.

"*Ne csuggedj*!" one of the Hungarians shouts, downing his glass.

Next a Polish student rises. "*Na zdrowie*!" Again the glasses are drained.

"*Prosit*!" one of the East Germans contributes. More guzzling.

Soon it is my turn. "Well, here's mud in your eye," I offer. All drink, though I'm pressed by one dogged student of English for an explanation of exactly what that phrase means.

Soon, having exhausted all the nationalities present but not all of the wine, a Hungarian girl rises shouting "*A votre Santé*!" in mangled French. Next somebody offers "Cheers!" for England.

"How about Russian?" I suggest to one of the Polish students. "What do they say in Russian?"

The noisy group falls silent. Then the young Pole on my right, his face florid with excitement and wine and his eyes bright, addresses me quite seriously. "There are no Russians here," he says firmly. We are Hungarians, Germans and Poles, not Russians. *Never* Russians!" His voice is drowned in a chorus of agreement. Soon they are back on the dance floor. The band is playing "16 Tons," the song Tennessee Ernie Ford made so popular during the cold war Fifties. I hadn't thought much of the words before. But actually, as a Hungarian student will point out to me later, "it's a worker's song."

* * *

"There's not much love here for Russia or Russians," an American writer living in Budapest says. "Politics is not a subject of immediate discussion among most people because to a large extent they know there's nothing they can do to influence politics. But there are discussions. And people are quite frank among themselves. The atmosphere here is a lot more free and open than I expected I'd find. Most of the literary people I know are definitely non-party types."

Actually, fewer than 800,000 of Hungary's 10.5 million people are members of the Hungarian Socialist

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Workers' Party, the Communist party which is Hungary's only legal political party.

For communists and non-communists alike life is hard but not without a growing number of compensations. And life, it's agreed by communists and non-communists inside and outside Hungary, is far better than at any time since the war. Wages are low by American standards, but social benefits are high. Health care is free. Food, child care, housing, public transportation, recreation and cultural activities are highly subsidized by the government. A ride on Budapest's clean, fast and practically crime-free subway costs a nickel. A two-pound loaf of bread is less than a dime. Film and theater tickets can be had for under a dollar. Prices of many consumer goods, which are in good supply generally, are often below Western levels. Russian tourists in Hungary often stock up on items they can't get at home.

The typical work week is six days with every other Saturday free. As in most Communist countries, tele-

vision sets are relatively inexpensive—every second family has one and the medium is used heavily by the party to make its points.

Housing remains a serious problem in Hungary despite a government effort which built one million new flats over the past 15 years. Most of the recent construction is ugly; Eastern European builders seem to have a preference for prefabricated concrete boxlike structures that manage to look old and grey before the mortar dries. There are long waiting lists for subsidized flats. Families with three or more children are given preference under the government's plan to encourage reproduction to combat Hungary's traditional labor shortage. Young singles and childless couples often live with relatives.

Eight years of education is now compulsory and the government says that 91 percent of all Hungarians finish the elementary grades, though illiteracy remains a problem among Hungary's 350,000 Gypsies. Study of the Russian language is mandatory from the fifth grade on, yet most Hungarian students speak better German or English. Several students told me the reason for such poor mastery of Russian is precisely because it is a required course, considered to be a hangover from the Stalinist Fifties when the "russification" of Hungarian culture was still thought possible.

Hungarians grow weary of Western tourists' questions about religion. The government doesn't keep official figures on the subject, but some 60 percent of the population is Roman Catholic. Since the 'Sixties, the leadership has pursued a peace policy with the church, one of the largest landowners in pre-Communist Hungary and one of the government's bitterest cold war foes.

A 1964 agreement with the Vatican provided for religious freedom, a freedom theoretically already granted by Hungary's constitution. In 1969, relations with the Vatican warmed further and the Pope appointed 10 new bishops to Hungarian posts. Last December Paul VI named the Rev. Laszlo Lekai Primate of Hungary. The appointment was viewed in the West as the capstone of a religious détente unimaginable in the Fifties or early Sixties while Jozef Cardinal Mindszenty maintained his bitter and lonely exile in the American Mission in Budapest, a symbol of the deep enmity between church and state in Hungary. In 1971 Mindszenty was permitted to leave the U.S. embassy where he had resided since being freed from prison during the 1956 uprising. The agreement stipulated that he leave Hungary. In February 1975, Mindszenty, bitter and living in Rome, was "retired" by Pope Paul who described him as "indomitable, tormented and controversial." The 86-year-old cardinal died in May 1975. In a large way, much of the residual Hungarian Catholic-vs.-Communist cold war fervor died with him. In 1976 Hungarian communists are quick to mention the government subsidies which keep many of the churches open. For the government the old buildings are tourist attractions, but for Hungary's still religious millions they remain houses of God where mass is celebrated and communion distributed the same way they have been in Hungary since the tenth century.

Perhaps a half million Jews were killed in Hungary or in concentration camps during the war. Today Jews are less than 10 percent of Hungary's population. Though few in number, they continue to play an important part in the nation's cultural and economic life. Several Hungarian Jews I spoke with refused to allow their names to be used. "These days we have few problems," one writer told me. "But there's an historical streak of anti-Semitism which runs through Hungary. We try to keep what you Americans call a low profile. We walk on eggs. The Soviets are notorious anti-Semites. We don't want them stepping in here, telling the Hungarian communists how to treat their Jewish intellectuals."

* * *

"Creative" is a word one hears these days among the party faithful throughout Hungary. They speak of "creative" work, "creative" economics, and of the need to follow the teachings of Marx "creatively."

Probably the most creative—and controversial—fruit of Marxian theory in all Hungary sits atop historic Castle Hill in the center of Budapest. It is the new,

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$50-million, 325-room Budapest Hilton Hotel, something of a symbol of East meeting West with both sides looking to come out better in the bargain. The hotel's location provides the controversy. It sits on the Buda side of the Danube just above the historic Fishermen's Bastion, hard by the sweeping, gothic Matthias' Church where Hungary's greatest king was crowned five centuries ago.

Architecturally incorporated within the hotel's modern concrete and tinted-glass walls are the remains of a medieval Dominican monastery and a subterranean cavern once reputedly the secret entrance of spies and statesmen to the nearby Royal Palace. The cavern, dubbed "Faust's Cellar" by Hilton promoters, will be a bar and lounge when the hotel opens early next year. Part of the ancient monastery will house a restaurant. For many of Budapest's two million citizens, the modern hotel is a blot on the historic and religious landscape, just as a "White House Hilton" or a "St. Patrick's Cathedral Hilton" would be for many Americans.

The Hungarian government first decided to build a hotel on the site and began negotiations with the Hilton company in the early Seventies. When complete, the Budapest Hilton will be owned totally by the government through its agent, the Danubius Hotel and Spa Co. Hilton, primarily an operating company, has no capital investment in the project. The chain will provide the Hilton name, operational advice and training, its worldwide booking service and a resident expert in return for a sliding percentage based on incoming revenue. The agreement runs for 20 years with a renewal option upon the consent of both parties.

The hotel's Hungarian general manager, Karoly Biro, is a dapper, Swiss-trained 50-year-old who says his first allegiance is to the Hungarian state with the Hilton brass running a close second. Biro has a doctorate in international law and a business instinct that would gladden the heart of Henry Ford.

"Everything here," he says with a sweeping gesture of both arms, "will be for sale. If there's a market for it, we'll even provide weddings in Matthias' Church and then bring the whole party across the street for a reception in our 12th-Century Dominican cloistered garden. We'll provide everything but the priest. Americans put Bibles in every hotel room," Biro says amiably. "We'll go you one better. We have a whole church right inside the hotel."

Biro, who has been supervising the project since construction began in 1973, is only half kidding. As we stroll through the 80-percent completed complex of bars, shops and suites, he grows more and more expansive. "You know, it was once thought quite impossible to build and operate a modern hotel in this medieval area. Aside from the aesthetic complaints, there were tremendous technical difficulties to overcome. For example, the hotel's air circulation will come from the network of tunnels and passageways that have run beneath this spot for centuries. With all that cool air, we'll save on air conditioning."

We are standing in the nearly completed Presidential Suite with its sweeping view of the Danube and Pest on the other side. The suite will rent for about $220 a day. I ask the manager which presidents—Communist or capitalist—will stay here when it's complete.

"We have no foreign policy," he says with a straight face. "If they pay for the service, we'll change the flag daily."

Well spoken, Comrade Hilton.

* * *

In 1976, American children no longer cower beneath their school desks in fear of the Red Menace. Yet they still do not know very much about their mutually coexisting adversaries. Dulles and Eisenhower are gone, along with Stalin and Krushchev. Yet there remain latent cold warriors sprinkled among the apostles of détente on both sides.

Despite cooperation in a growing number of areas, the Communist and capitalist systems remain unalterably opposed in fundamental philosophy. Janos Kadar phrased it this way: "It should be known that in the field of politics we are—even if we insist on the most polite terminology—opponents. While in ideology the two systems face each other with unreconcilable antagonism."

Last July Fourth, on the 200th anniversary of the nation at the forefront of the capitalist system, Clayton Mudd, the U.S. chargé d'affaires in Budapest made the following remarks at a picnic for families of embassy employees and American tourists:

"I'd like to remind the children here, and even those not so young, that we are celebrating July Fourth in a country not only opposed but antagonistic to all of those principles we hold dear. I hope you children here one day will look back on this celebration, proud of the fact that we showed the Flag here today in the People's Republic of Hungary."

Somewhere, the ghosts of so many happy warriors must have been smiling.

CHRISTIANITY & CRISIS is celebrating its 35th Anniversary with two events: 1) a one-day colloquium on "The Human and Social Costs of the United States Economic System" in the Assembly Hall of Riverside Church, Riverside Drive at 120th Street in New York City, commencing at 9:30 on November 5, 1976. Admission free. 2) 35th anniversary dinner on Church, State and Human Rights, to be addressed by Congressman Donald M. Fraser, in South Hall, Riverside Church, 7 P.M., November 5, 1976. Tickets are $12.50 each and must be ordered in advance from: *Christianity & Crisis*, 537 West 121st St., New York, N.Y. 10027.

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KUNG PHOOEY

THE SCREEN

Beyond *Death Wish, Taxi Driver* and *A Clockwork Orange*, beyond Sam Peckinpah, Clint Eastwood and spaghetti Westerns, beyond even samurai films, what kung fu movies accomplish is the total alienation of violence. Perhaps this is because the kung fu movie is an art form that came into being in a totally alien society, Hong Kong, where Chinese live cut off from both the traditional culture of China's past and the neighboring culture of her Communist present. America is an immigrant society, but Hong Kong is a transient one, which gives it the far greater capacity for glorifying violence in its art. In a society where everyone not only comes from someplace else, but hopes to go on to someplace else, the only indigenous culture is bound to be based on the worship of raw power. In a place like this violence is not contained by culture as it is, however imperfectly, in traditional societies. Rather, violence dictates culture. It becomes the whole of culture. And kung fu movies are the perfect expression of such a culture.

For Western audiences, too, kung fu movies have their appeal because they purify our experience of violence. We don't care that the makers of martial arts movies give us Chinese history in a garbled and indifferent version, for we know as well as they do that the story lines in these films are, like those in porn films, just a clumsy pretext for the action. Like the moviemakers themselves, we know little and care less about the public issues or private motives that might give all this violence, if not justification, at least comprehensibility. Even in *Touch of Zen*, a three-hour epic currently making inroads into the highbrow audience kung fu has not reached before, the flaws that seem to inhere in the genre by its very nature persist. The film begins with a long, meditative passage of shots establishing the Chinese countryside and some ruins. It's an opening that might almost suggest a tragic love story instead of a martial-arts epic. But it quickly becomes apparent that this induction is mere window dressing, like the prologue by some "doctor" with which porn films pretend to be legit documentaries or sex-education films. Like the science in a porn film, the poetry in kung fu is a lot of eyewash.

The personal sort of story that those lyrical opening shots suggest would require a consistency and development of character which director King Hu simply isn't up to. The hero is a fey, bumbling artisan for half the film, and then, inexplicably, he turns out to be a brilliant military strategist. The heroine first refuses to be courted by this artisan, then seduces him, and finally enters a Buddhist monastery, leaving her baby by the artisan outside the walls for him to bring up. (A baby left on a monastery doorstep in the hope not that it will be taken in, but that it will be taken *out*, is a novel twist for us Westerners.) At least these protagonists are consistent enough to last the whole movie, however. The antagonists don't do even that well. One whom we at first mistake for a hero gets bumped off incidentally halfway through the film. The main villain, a warlord, doesn't appear until about an hour into the story, and he is killed off another hour before the end. Almost as if he were then caught off guard by the warlord's untimely demise, King Hu must then scrounge around for a new villain, one of the warlord's generals heretofore unseen in the film, who can carry the balance of the fight scenes.

What this atmosphere of incoherence lends to kung fu films is a kind of mysticism. They detach violence from social reality the way a mystical experience detaches one from earthly cares. Thus detached—we can't tell within 1000 years when King Hu's film is set—the violence becomes a religious experience, an epiphany. In point of fact, *Touch of Zen*, whose title suggests it is hip to the religious appeal violence has for its audience, ends with an epiphany. When even the heroine and her best general are unable to beat the warlord's general in hand-to-hand combat, their rescue falls to her teacher, the leader of the Buddhist monks. Only he is able to beat the warlord's general, who must at last resort to deception to get close enough to the good monk to stab him. As almost everyone else left in the cast staggers around in a death agony, the monk, bleeding not red but gold from his knife wound, retreats to the mountaintop and assumes the lotus position before the setting sun. In the end, in other words, the total alienation of violence masquerades as total harmony, oneness with the universe, inner peace. With this image of the monk silhouetted before the sun, the film ends. This moment of spiritual uplift, of transcendence, is in effect what the whole three hours of hand springs, knife thrusts, dart throws and elbow chops are all about.

Of course, it's no good laying all the blame on kung fu movies. A lot of it belongs to kung fu itself, which is just an Asian form of fascism. The combination of mysticism, discipline and violence in kung fu is nothing but the old Nazi *Kraft durch Freud* dressed up in a ghi instead of a brown shirt, and its popularity with Americans is unpropitious to say the least. All these years now we have been spending money and blood to contain Communism in Asia, and what happens? Something far more insidious sneaks up behind us: kung fu movies. While we have been vigilant against Communism, kung fu movies have spread their filthy aesthetic influence all the way to Japan, which we had always hoped would be democracy's first line of defense in the Orient. Irrefutable evidence of this comes from yet another film

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that was shown at the New York Film Festival, Nagisa Oshima's *The Empire of the Senses*. With Oshima's film, kung fu extends its own empire not only from the Chinese mainland to Japan, but from violence to sex.

As I guess a few snide remarks I've made here demonstrate, the equation between king fu and pornography is made readily enough. Oshima's film attempts to do for sex what kung fu has done for violence—to isolate it from all other human activity, to aggrandize it in and for itself, to turn it into a mystical experience. The film deals with the love affair of a gangster and a prostitute who, after the first twenty minutes, spend all their time in hotel rooms —ing and —ing. As two hours of this would be hard to fake, Oshima doesn't. His actors really—and—(and even—now and then to break the monotony). Since Mr. Oshima also refuses to provide even the minimal plot most porn films have, the idea seems to be that pure sex, cut off from all other reality, will become like a Kabuki play. It will become a symbolization of all life rather than a part of it. By this feat of self-transcendence, pornography now presumably makes itself more meaningful than conventional movie drama instead of less meaningful, as it used to be. What a breakthrough. Sex becomes, like kung fu, a religious experience.

The only thing that has saved us from this seditionist propaganda is the U.S. Customs service, which confiscated the film after the Festival press screening, revoked its import license right on the spot, and shipped it back to Japan before it could corrupt the minds of us Americans. Well done, boys! Keep up the good works.

COLIN L. WESTERBECK, JR.

FALL BOOK ISSUE

FANTASY, HISTORY AND THE NEW FICTION

GENE H. BELL

Will the ferment of the 1960s carry through the 1970s?

Updike's *A Month of Sundays* and Bellows' *Humboldt's Gift* may differ in subject matter—a WASP pastor's erotic escapades in one, a Jewish writer's old-age misadventures in the other. Ethnicity aside, however, the books share a basic likeness: both depict, via traditional Realism, the gradual isolation and, eventually, total alienation of a middle-class intellectual from everybody else. 1970s sexuality notwithstanding, these novels' techniques and concerns stem ultimately from the climate of 1950s existentialism.

Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* likewise manifest differences—Reed evokes the 1920s rise of the Afro-American arts and their clash with White élitism, while Doctorow portrays immigrants labor struggles, upward mobility, and lowbrow racism under Teddy Roosevelt. Nevertheless the books show key similarities: dispensing with existential subtleties of character, both delineate a broadly inclusive social-epochal panorama. These novels, ultimately animated by 1960s radicalism, exemplify the American novel's rediscovery of the large arena, the supra-individual role of history.

In 1936, Allen Tate took issue with "the historical imagination," a mode of thought he adjudged restrictive and incomplete. Tate was then pleading for the ante-bellum South, but his distaste for history anticipates the 1950s, when the New Critics—those neo-feudal nostalgists, hostile to social change—achieved virtual orthodoxy in literary thinking. With Southern formalism triumphant on campuses, historical ignorance and amnesia became respectable mainstream attitudes; few literary critics, when venturing beyond the abstractions of pure poesy, were equipped to deal in specific cultural and historical terms about human experience. And Cold War novelists shared in the dominant ahistorical ethos, concentrating—in a prose equivalent to poetic explication—on the microscopic problems of Self, or at best on isolated inter-personal relations, with social context rendered as surface décor, the mere trappings of traditional fiction.

Foreign authors often express perplexity at the Amer-

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ican 1950s' revival of old-fashioned Realism. But it is no accident that Cold War culture—essentially a Restoration of pre-New Deal, 19th century Liberalism—should also have brought back the 19th century novel. The revival, however, was only partial, since the outer scaffold of the classic novels, at one time rich with social insights, was now taken up solely with a fashionable metaphysics of personal alienation, with correspondingly scant attention paid to links between Self and society. The Cold War author's pure subjectivity inevitably blinded him to those large historical factors—the rise of industrialism, feudal-liberal conflicts, the events of 1848—which Balzac, Stendhal, Flaubert and George Eliot had brought to bear on individual character. The 1950s novelist saw Julien Sorel but not the Empire and Restoration, perceived not the forest but an isolated tree.

This historical blind spot dominated 1950s thinking. To orthodox intellectuals, history simply appeared to have come to an end. The domestic peace, the easily-won foreign wars, and the largely accidental prosperity reinforced the illusion that all social problems had been solved—that history was past. 1950s novelists formed the poetic contingent in the Cold War, swam with the current of "end-of-ideology" academics who construed America's then-successes not as an historically conditioned—and thereby provisional—moment, but as a norm for all times. For just as empirical researchers studied microscopic problems of voting behavior, government procedure, or small-town sex—universalizing these phenomena, seldom noting the long-range historical determinants that allow for them—similarly the Cold War novelists dwelt on the finer-grained aspects of individual selfhood, seldom relating the Self to larger historical structures.

The pattern for much 1950s fiction is set by Bellow's first book, *Dangling Man* (1942), in which a college graduate dawdles about, at odds with family and friends, indifferent to politics, oblivious to a world war of which we hear little but whose draft-call he awaits. Here in rough form are the moody subjectivism, the wispy apoliticism eventually to characterize the Malamuds, the Updikes—and the latter-day dangling men named Herzog, Tommy Wilhelm, Charlie Citrine. Trapped by their personality problems, Bellow's characters—even when married or attached—live mostly within themselves, indulging their private loneliness. Solipsism carries the day; save for an occasional anti-Communist aside, politics and society are notably absent, while few characters, outside of the alienated hero and his associates, radiate much presence. Henderson's Africans are merely quaint, and indeed Bellow's Africa, Mexico, Europe and Chicago are curiously lifeless, stage props devoid of sensory interest.

Malamud's settings—the claustrophobic rooming houses in *The Magic Barrel*, the decayed shop in *The Assistant*—have more sensorial immediacy than do Bellow's urban slums, but they sum up all the more his thematics of the isolated Self. Although in *The Tenants* he evokes the tensions dividing New York Blacks and Jews, the conflict—limited to two writers in an abandoned tenement—remains purely psychological, interpersonal, with scarce hints as to social forces. Even those on-the-road yarns dealing with individual flight—*Rabbit, Run* for example—are essentially the obverse side of cultish claustrophobia, alienation taken out of doors. And when Updike (whose virtuoso prose gives a sheen to his intellectually impoverished world outlook) attempts in *Couples*, to take on an entire town, the subject is quite literally who's sleeping with whom.

Of the 1950s novelists, only Mailer showed a grasp of social history—as in *The Naked and the Dead*, with its overview of the major components (patrician, technician, plebian) of war politics, or in *Barbary Shore*, that artful evocation of frustrated Leftism. When the latter novel took a critical drubbing, however, Mailer too pulled back from history, subsequently trying to fuse his dislocated radicalism with hipster existentialism and macho sexuality—irreconcilable entities that couldn't jell together, the result being those oddly skewed later fictions, flabby with coincidence. Mailer's case sadly exemplifies the difficulty of transcending the subjectivist syndrome in the 1950s, when—Beat counter-cults aside—the personal-alienation mystique was the sole respectable subject matter for prose narrative.

Not that these authors' works fall short simply because of "content." Though Bellow-Updike decidedly lack the international status of Faulkner, Dos Passos or Hemingway (who were widely read and imitated abroad), they remain skilled if not great *littérateurs*; Malamud may in fact be our one consistently satisfying verbal artist. Still, something seems missing, incomplete in American 1950s fiction; its studies in alienation are no match for those of Beckett, whose barebones artifacts, vivid and terrifyingly funny, are stripped of all narrative convention, their sad heroes adrift in a world of shifting names and shadows. Bellow's and Malamud's formal Realism was, paradoxically, never real enough—its 19th century procedures ill-suited for conveying a modern sensibility, its manifest worlds too detailed, too recognizably "American" and not "alien" in nature. Despite his up-to-date existentialism, the 1950s author believed too much in Cold War America, whereas existential nihilism and despair was an authentic, shared mood of protest in mid-century Europe.

History—real-life history, with riots, radicalism, and war—came back in the 1960s, taking ahistorical intellectuals by surprise, and eliciting varied responses from 1950s novelists. Whereas Mailer plunged into the thick of battle, Malamud stayed at a distance from events. Updike, despite his shortcomings, depicted quite vividly, in *Rabbit Redux*, the damage done to small-

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town patriotism. Bellow, by contrast, laid bare his conservatism in the crotchety *Sammler's Planet*, wherein radicals are portrayed as rude barbarians, while the prime cause of 1960s turmoil—Vietnam—is, incredibly, not once mentioned.

On the other hand younger authors not tied to old orthodoxies have conjured up a nightmarish perception of history. Fantasy dominates much of their work—perhaps suggesting that, in order to grasp 20th century issues, a sense of unreality is requisite. Some 150 years ago, when history looked to be a steady socio-economic march forward ("progress"), novelists could assume and depict a comprehensible, if not always tolerable, development process—the then-acknowledged framework of liberal history. Beginning with 1914 that secular faith loses credibility; numerous authors have since sought alternatives in snob estheticism, crank feudalism or pop existentialism. Now history is being rediscovered by the fantasists—an irony certainly. But then, perhaps only those minds with a taste for the shocking, the bizarre, the seemingly improbable, can fully encompass and recreate modern history in all its weird absurdity, only an hallucinatory imagination, capable of dreaming up mysterious forces or secret societies, as Pynchon and Reed do, can evoke the sinister capacity of contemporary life, the terrible news left out by the textbooks, the powers covertly in control. . . .

In Barthelme's best fictions—produced at the height of Vietnam and the student Left—obscure social strife lingers menacingly in the background, upsetting the psyche; faraway military skirmishes unexpectedly disturb middle-class rituals. *The Indian Uprising* and *Report* deals with fancied wars, though the conflicts seem bewildering (as Vietnam was to most Americans) rather than simply brutal. *Brain Damage* intones the mental confusion widespread across the land, *A Nation of Wheels* tells an hilarious history of auto production, and *The Rise of Capitalism* poetically lampoons the historical contours as well as the daily tensions of monopoly-capitalist life.

Semi-serious social commentary, Marxist in flavor, bobs up here and there in *City Life* and *Sadness*, its standing slyly undercut by the consumer bric-a-brac (J & B Whisky, Chock Full o' Nuts, Chevrolets), as well as by the allusions to LeFebvre, Mann or Truffaut that flitter about in Barthelme's prose. This grab-bag of commodities tossed in without apparent logic or discrimination, mirrors the over-ripe, anomic purposelessness of urban America, the sense that, despite gadgetry and "culture" in abundance, things aren't fitting together, people don't understand what's happening. Barthelme's stories give shape to a radical sensibility peculiar to upper-middle-class American intellectuals, who accurately perceive the current crisis but lack the means of applying their insights—and whose cold comforts are learned wit, mock-cliché and tireless irony ("But I love my irony," says a voice in *City Life*).

Thomas Pynchon, by temperament an historical fantasist, conjured up in his first novel, *V.*, a world nightmare stretching from 1900 and comprising North African intrigues, colonial atrocities, both World Wars, Maltese politics and Manhattan *lumpen* life—all darkly connected with an ubiquitous V., she (he, it) taking on countless V-shapes (Von Trotha, Victoria, Venezuela) across the globe. Pynchon's single fancy, albeit striking, never develops or resolves itself, and so fails to hold together such disparate strands—though each episode is in itself fascinating. Unfortunately Pynchon's imagination went completely out of control in *Gravity's Rainbow*, with its 800 pages of outrageous fantasy and esoterica. The novel's central conceit—World War II as the brainchild of a gigantic British-German-American technological combine—is perversely neat and partly factual, but the author's dense prose and pop jingles lack the long-range strength to carry so much material through to the chaotic finale. Pynchon's erudition is breathtaking—how many American authors are familiar with Argentine poetry or medieval Dutch?—but undigested encyclopedism alone does not make good history, be it the academic or the fantastical kind.

But *The Crying of Lot 49*—Pynchon's best novel, brief, lucid and hallucinatory—does its job masterfully. Via the sleuthing efforts of his heroine, Oedipa Mass, Pynchon unfolds a vast historical conspiracy named Tristero, an underground postal network that, through the Dutch wars, a gory Jacobean play, the French and Mexican revolutions, Bismarck's Germany, and the American Westward push, has defied numerous authorities, wending its way to an L.A. suburb named San Narciso, where Tristero operatives communicate in code. Pynchon's novelette is a luminous parable of invisible social powers, a prose harbinger to Polanski's *Chinatown*; and Oedipa's vindicated paranoia is a presage of the chills many of us were to feel when finding out about the ITT-CIA-Chile links, GM's and ITT's Nazi connections, *Time*'s now forgotten pro-fascist sympathies, Nixon's near-police state.

Impelled by the ferment of the 1960s, Vonnegut has ridden high on the fantastic-history wave. *Mother Night* looks to be a perception of Nazis guided by Hannah Arendt, *Cat's Cradle* a satire on then-current topics such as mad scientists, Foreign Aid, Caribbean dictators and the Bomb. Doubtless the aerial destruction of Indochina helped Vonnegut externalize, in *Slaughterhouse Five*, his own terrifying experience amid the rubble of Dresden, and thereby suggest the horror and uselessness of strategic bombing—a notion which, before the Vietnam disaster, had seldom been granted a hearing.

Vonnegut's novels are at times amusing, but their thin texture of regularly-spaced wisecracks wears poorly; his famed one-liners—"So it goes," "Forget the bad times and remember the good ones"—are in the Amer-

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ican cracker-barrel tradition. Contrasted with Barthelme's coruscating, surprise-filled prose, Vonnegut's rows of single-idea paragraphs and quickie chapters topped by a punch-line, are wit most facile; the novels read like jokebooks or TV routines. And where Pynchon's secret sects allude obliquely to real societies, Vonnegut's Tralfamadore and Bokononism serve as Disney-style escape worlds rather than as imaginative approaches to this one. Vonnegut's is a nightmare-history for adolescents just discovering about hypocrisy, who like mocking village bigots, crackbrained militarists, and other easy targets, who stand unmoved by Thomas Mann or *Les Carabiniers* but are easily taken by Herman Hesse or *Slaughterhouse Five*. Vonnegut is the counter-culture's writer, with all the good intentions and barren intellect that that rubric implies.

On the other hand 1960s radicalism successfully fuses fantasy with history in two major works: Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*. Reed's book is a rollickingly fanciful account of "Jes Grew," a generalized label referring to the Harding-Era rise of the Black Arts (music, dance, letters, thought) and their unmistakable imprint on White American life. A threat to vested cultural interests, Jes Grew is combated by (of all things) a modern incarnation of the Knights Templars as well as by the Atonist Path, a hard-line, humorless sect symbolizing the repressive, anti-sensual, Christian West. Reed's feverish story-line—imaginatively reinforced with photos, posters, news dispatches, type-face changes and a bibliography—weaves in and about a large panorama that takes in the old cotton economy, anti-labor politics, the *Tribune* articles of Marx and Engels, the 1921 Boston police strike, and the 1929 débacle—plus (a kind of running subplot, and a fact largely ignored by history textbooks) the invasion and 20-year occupation of Haiti by the U.S. Marines.

Mumbo Jumbo—intellectually energetic and visionary, touching in its details of character, and also weirdly funny—just misses being perfect because of Reed's occasional bouts of solemn overstatement. (His interpolated 4000-year history of the Atonist-Jes Grew conflict takes up 30 pages, at the moment of highest suspense; it reads like a far-fetched sermon, or worse, like a lifeless John Barth parody of one.) On the whole, however, *Mumbo Jumbo*, with its elaborate fantastic-historical machinery, is among the most impressive American novels to have appeared in some time.

Doctorow's turn-of-the-century social landscape is similarly vast. Besides the principals—an established WASP family, a widowed Jewish immigrant and his daughter, a Black piano player and his sweetheart—the *Ragtime* cast also includes *e.g.* Houdini, Dreiser, Emma Goldman, Stanford White, Henry Ford, J. P. Morgan, Booker T. Washington. The famous and the obscure are thus rendered formally equal in Doctorow's narrative, their socio-economic differences nullified, the suggestion being that everyone—robber-baron or sex-goddess, writer, radical, or housemaid—ultimately takes part in the major issues of his or her time.

The separate lives of these divers characters intersect and intermingle, acting upon and affecting one another in unexpected ways; regardless of social status, they become co-participants, knowingly or not, in such large dramas as the Peary expedition, the rise of assembly-line production, labor struggles, Black-White tensions, sex scandals, media exploitation, the growth of entertainment industries, upward and downward mobility, the co-optation of talented radicals and the domestic results of the Great War. With its lucid prose and spacious social vision *Ragtime* recalls that incomparably greater exemplar of fantastic history, *One Hundred Years of Solitude;* unlike Márquez and other authors, however, Doctorow remakes history without recourse to pure fantasy—though the fancied accounts of public figures and of Houdini's exploits could be interpreted as a kind of partial magic.

As everyone ritually remarks, *Ragtime* is history reconstructed through 1960s optics. The usual implication is that this is somehow bad, that Doctorow has done wrong, but there is really nothing new here—George Eliot and Tolstoy wrote about the 1820s some fifty years afterwards. Moreover, only in recent times could Doctorow's narrative have been dreamt up and realized. Inconceivable in periods of consensus, *Ragtime* is equally unthinkable in the 1930s, when the shared belief in the imminent collapse of capitalism was too strong. The Nixon years seasoned many opposition intellectuals, reminded them that American society, though periodically shaken, remains and will long remain an awesome and powerful force—that, as Doctorow's final page shows, there are always patriots and parades. Significantly, the book stops at about 1918, the beginnings of that period, now ending, when our military interventions in Europe boosted the national economy, expanded our markets, and gave over to America not only world hegemony, but also that potent, persuasive image, here and abroad, of messianic liberator.

American oppositionists have, in *Ragtime*, a brilliant, humane, historically sophisticated novel they can call their own, for it furnishes an imaginative model of the deeper conflicts as well as the subtler stratagems of our civilization. This, no doubt, is why the *New York Times Book Review* staff sharply divided about listing *Ragtime* among the year's 10 best; why, save for the Left-wing papers, the entire British press ganged up on *Ragtime*; and why conservatives like John Lukacs or Robert Alter pretty much dismissed the book; for Doctorow brings back immigrant poverty, anti-labor violence and white Negrophobia with an unsettling clarity, a lofty assuredness that puts in doubt the bland textbook myths of a smooth and just national history, the received view

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of America as an intrinsically free and peaceable land, selflessly defending world freedoms.

Whether these authors will continue to nourish a reawakened sense of history, or turn instead to "safer" subjects (as Barthelme appears to have done in his latest novel *The Dead Father*) for the apolitical 1970s, only the future can tell. Even so, should the tide pull back after *Ragtime*, enough remarkable writing has come out to mark 1965-75 as a decade of special creative ferment. Thanks to LBJ and Nixon, who brought to the surface those aspects of American history obscured by Cold War rhetoric, American fiction has effected a break from the subjectivist modes of thought and old-realist esthetics revived by the Cold War authors —and in the process has broadened its materials and recast its formal molds. Or so it seems for the present; one can only hope that a still-not-dead Reaganism, an expanding Southern Rim, and a growingly vocal libertarian Right will not issue forth yet another Restoration of the social and literary values of the 19th century.

AFTER CHRISTIANITY, WHAT?

GERALD J. GALGAN

Jill Krementz

IN an interview in *The New York Times Book Review* on April 7, 1968, John Updike observed that in his first novel, *Poorhouse Fair*, and in his then most recent novel, *Couples*, he was posing the question of "After Christianity, what?" The answer explored in "its many permutations" in *Couples* was sex as "the glue ambience, and motive force of the new humanism" replacing Christianity. What he couldn't quite account for, so he said, was that the "withdrawal and wrath of God" was ultimately experienced by the hero of *Couples*, Piet Hanema, as "a relief." Updike persists, it would seem, in raising the same question and exploring more permutations of the same answer in his most recent novel. The new twist of his latest contribution, however, centers in the discomfort rather than relief the Divine withdrawal effects in the hero, the chastised Reverend Tom Marshfield.

Martin Heidegger, a commentator of a very different ilk on the fate of Christianity, wrote in his "Letter on Humanism" that "whether and how God and the gods . . . enter, presenting and absenting themselves in the clearing of Being, is not determined by man." Updike too intimates in *Couples* and *A Month of Sundays** that the withdrawal of the Christian God from the minds and hearts of all but a few of contemporary, acquisitive men is ultimately not a matter of clear-cut human choice and determination. There is in Updike's writing a kind of fatalism about the withdrawal and what assumes the role of the Divine "glue." This fatalism is given its baldest expression in *Couples* by the priest-figure, Freddy Thorne, when he speaks of the fate of dwellers of exurban Tarbox as suspension "in this one of those dark ages that visits mankind between *millennia, between the death and rebirth of gods*, when there is nothing to steer by but sex and stoicism and the stars."

The fatalism in *A Month of Sundays* emerges less explicitly in Marshfield's perception and, at times, exemplification of a contemporary wasteland, a "desert beyond reclamation, a feeble and featureless wilderness where none but the most regenerate of demonic superstitions—astrology, augury, Hinduism—spring up in the hearts of the young." In Tarbox a cross section of its male occupants feverishly adhere to the glue of the new humanism; in his latest novel, only the wayward minister is depicted as practicing the new form of ritual activity with a female sampling of his congregation.

Marshfield's soul is a battleground of competing allegiances: the vocation of sex as surrogate for God and the call of guilt in his adulterous pursuits ("How *intuitively religious*," he remarks, was his consorts' "view of sex . . . Where was their guilt?"; yet, "The cloth of the adulterous couch," he insists, is interwoven "with the glowing, living filaments of transience, of time itself, our element, our only element, which Christ consecrated by entering history, rather than escaping it, as did Buddha."), the lingering of belief and the intrusion of disbelief in the God of

*Recently issued in paperback, Fawcett, $1.95. Updike's newest novel, *Marry Me*, just published, will be reviewed in a forthcoming issue.

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Abraham (Marshfield confesses to his senile father, himself a minister, "I have no faith. Or rather, I have faith, but it doesn't seem to apply.").

Marshfield is deeply perplexed and pained at God's absenting himself from the "clearing" of the world of contemporary man, yet he holds no towering, unambiguous faith in this "Deus absconditus" with which to call back those in his care. There is no consolation, though Marshfield attempts to contrive one as when he says "No man, unless it was Jesus, believes. We can only profess to believe." It is "our station to be visible and to provide men with the opportunity to profess the impossible that makes their lives possible," he says; yet he is constrained to admit his "own captivity within a God I mocked, within a life I abhorred."

Marshfield, alas, is an all too willing prophet of he knows not what: the new humanism or the God of his fathers. He is willing, as he writes his memoirs in his desert place of confinement and cure, to preach the God of his fathers; yet his willingness to proclaim combines with his unwillingness to act upon his proclamation and leads him to cry out: "I am stripped and anonymous, and feel mighty. The splendor of space and the splendid waste of time enter my self-negation. See Saints, Lives of."

In essence, Marshfield is driven and fated to preach, but he can only self-consciously preach his struggle with the God of old who sent angels to wrestle in his stead. In his actions, he is willing and reluctant to follow the scent of sexual coupling to its limit ("No partner and I ever tried the nave and its pews."). As with his soul in preaching, so with his body in sexual liaison: he is driven, impelled, fated, permitted no moral confidence either in his beliefs or his adulteries. Even when his guilt is mitigated, he is plagued by the oddity, so contrary to many of the unbelieving of his congregation, that "feeling good and being good don't seem to be the same thing."

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If Marshfield, unlike Hanema in *Couples*, is unrelieved by the absenting of God from the innermost human recesses of his flock, he is somewhat relieved by the call of a new humanism which would leave us the needs of the body and their assuagement without Transcendence. The new humanism and the remnants of the old churches cannot, even in contrived combination, liberate him from either his pain or his inability to feel pain.

"In general," his diagnosis reads, "the churches . . . bore for me the same relation to God that billboards did to Coca-Cola: they promoted thirst without quenching it." So, "Away with personhood! Mop up spilt religion! Let

us have it in its original stony jars or not at all!" He cannot resign himself, in conscience, to "the new work ethic of sufficient sex, sex as the exterior sign of interior grace." Nor can he extricate himself from sex as "the last sanctuary for violence, conquest, and rapture, in a world as docilely crammed as an elevator ascending after lunchtime."

Marshfield, it would appear, is both microcosm and feeble prophet in relation to his flock which, in its namelessness, embraces the contemporary affluence-bound American soul. As a microcosm of the abiding disbelief beneath contemporary American credal dressings and ritual, he recapitulates the fatalism and determinism of a dark age with only "sex and stoicism and the stars" to steer by; as a prophet he yearns to live beyond and above the growing darkness of this age. The God of Abraham once manifested his Being unto him but now, as in the situation of his flock, speaks no more. As a boy, the furniture in his father's house was "a constant proof of, as it were, a teleologic bias in things . . . it has taken me forty of my years to begin to transfer my sense of the Divine outdoors . . . I had no choice but to follow my father into the ministry; the furniture forced me to do it." He has his memory and he still has a soul. But "let us pray," he tells us, "the two not prove at the end of time to be synonymous."

As, at once, feeble prophet and microcosm of a dark age, Marshfield would like to reconcile, if he could, singlehandedly, the new humanistic dream of the longevity and well-being of the human body with the corpuscles of Transcendence flowing in his blood. But sexual penetration becomes possible only with the real unbelievers, as exemplified in his wife Jane and his paramour Alicia. They serve to lead him "out of the wilderness where I did not know that our acts, every one, are homage . . . There is a grandeur, an onslaught of Nous and of dizzying altitude, in the act of placing a communion wafer between the parted lips of a mouth, that, earlier in the very week of which this was the Sabbath day, had received one's throbbingly ejaculated seed."

Yet, such reconciliation proves to be transient and superficial, unable to fathom the essence of the antipathy of the new humanism and Marshfield's Barthian sense of Divine Transcendence. In the person of the believer Mrs. Harlow, Marshfield confronts his sexual impotency for the first time and greets it "as the survivor within me of faith, a piece of purity amid all this relativistic concupiscence, this plastic modernity, this adulterate industry, this animated death."

The novel concludes with the coming, at the last hour of his stay, of Ms. Prynne, the directress of his place of clerical recuperation, into his bedroom; as such, it could be construed as Marshfield's attainment of a recon-

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ciliation. The adulterous but religious Prynne, newly emergent from the pages of Hawthorne, and now devoted to the repair of "American religious dislocation," undresses before him "without comment," after having knocked on his door in a manner that was not "the knock of doom after all." But such is at best an anemic symbol, more likely a paltry substitute, for Divine Transcendence rather than a powerful symbol thereof. Marshfield is left to wonder not at a new revelation of God to his wasted psyche, no less to that of waste-land-fated America, but at this all too "human contact, this blank-browed thing we do for one another."

Thus have we Updike's continuing and latest treatment of the question of "After Christianity, what?" The answer in its multifariousness reduces, it would seem, to the immediacy of sexuality, the cult of the well-being of the human body and the worshipful nurture of its possibilities, and the occasional, faint, but persistent remembrance of Divine Transcendence as the ground of all too human being—an uneasy, troubled, but continuing marriage in an "age between the death and rebirth of gods." There is a marriage of sorts but there is no reconciliation.

Not without cause does Updike create Marshfield as a Barthian "in reaction" to his father's "liberalism." Like Feuerbach, Karl Barth is skeptical of men's ideas of God and treats them as mere wish-fulfillments. God is the "wholly other"; there can be no traditionally theological "analogy of being" —no being that is common by nature to God and man. Only God's totally free Grace bestowed in Revelation establishes any connection between God and man. Barth's alienation of human discourse and the Word of God has been criticized as entailing a necessary disjunction between the Divine Word and human social realities. On this score Barth has been charged with a theological picture in which Divine Transcendence is unable to permeate the skin of the human social organism. But in Marshfield Barthianism is self-evident; Barth has simply read the writing on the wall. The sense that religious belief, when it can somehow be maintained, cannot soak into the interstices of society is ever present in *A Month of Sundays* and *Couples*. Religion has become a sack of private feelings and opinions—at its worst self-indulgence, at its best a poignant Pascalian poetry, as in Hammarskjold's *Markings*.

Updike alludes to the privatized being of religion ever so briefly. Thus the frontispiece to *Couples* is taken from Paul Tillich's *The Future of Religions*:

"There is a tendency in the average citizen, even if he has a high standing in his profession, to consider the decisions relating to the life of the society to which he belongs as matters of fate on which he has no influence—like the Roman subjects all over the world in the period of the Roman Empire, a mood favorable for the resurgence of religion but unfavorable for the preservation of a living democracy."

The kind of religion addressed by this excerpt, however, is an essentially private one. Nonetheless, Tillich's words are telling.

Updike appears compelled to examine the fate of Christianity in an age when the gods have absconded, leaving man to ponder his groundless experience. In doing this, Updike teases us with the enigma of American cultural experience itself. The burning of the Congregationalist Church, the remnant of American Puritanism, toward the close of *Couples*, is seductively proffered to those who would look for some evidence in Updike of a probing of the character, meaning, and "fate" of the "destiny" of American Civilization. A faint political air provides a point of reference for both novels: in *Couples*, the assassination of President Kennedy, in *A Month of Sundays*, the "unravelling" of Richard Nixon. But Updike never quite delivers the goods—a situation which in part may account for his appeal.

Perhaps, then, the question "After Christianity, what?" is only a superficial rendition of a more momentous question hopelessly tucked away in what lies unspoken in Updike's intriguing words. Even if it isn't, Updike has for all practical purposes answered the question he proposed. There is no "after"; there is only some kind of distillation or mutation of Christianity, beautiful or monstrous, creative or destructive; for, Christianity is as much blood to the American soul as it is to the body of the sexually restless Marshfield. But if there is a more momentous question locked inside Updike's creations, perhaps it pertains to a "why" rather than a "what."

Why this fatalism both about the absence of God and about the "preservation" of that democratic, republican being still vaguely but staunchly associated with the American social experiment? Is there a more than accidental connection between the idea of a Transcendent Ground outside human experience and the ideal of present-day America's recovering its roots in the political order of its Founders? Is there what approaches an inherent connection between the God of our fathers and the Republic of our founders, their deism notwithstanding? And if there be an abiding tension between the idea of Divine governance of Creation and the ideal of America's Founders, or what Lincoln called "the capability of a people to govern themselves," is this tension itself ultimately productive?

In that interview eight years ago, Updike held out the bait. "There is a sense," he said, aping his creation Freddy Thorne in *Couples*, "I have of God having removed his blessing from America. Yet a kind a blessing remains." The question, however, of whether the present American fatalistic attitude about itself and its meaning is a temporary phenomenon, itself contrived, or a telltale mark of a new Dark Age in Western Civilization, the question of the reciprocity of fatalism in religious and political matters, has yet to assume embodiment in Updike's words. For the moment, and only for the moment, one hopes, these words remain as they have remained in Updike's prior works, pinned on the Procrustean bed of sexual adventure and misadventure. There is a bed of another kind crying to be "made" in contemporary American literature.

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OF ELIOT AND POUND

JANET GROTH

T.S. Eliot
STEPHEN SPENDER
Viking, $8.95

Ezra Pound
DONALD DAVIE
Viking, $7.95

In spite of the considerable amount of territory T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound held in common — their alienation from America, their tendency to disappear from their poems into a variety of *dramatis personnae,* and their fundamentally classical approach to literature—the differences between them, as men and as poets, are still more striking than their similarities, a point that is sometimes overlooked because their names are so often linked. In the books under review—recent additions to Viking's Modern Masters series, edited by Frank Kermode—these differences are reflected in the tone and temper of the work each has inspired (though of course the individuality of the authors, Stephen Spender and Donald Davie figures as well).

Still it is tempting to see the personalities of Eliot and Pound as having informed and to some extent directed the shape and character of the books that bear their names. Spender's *T.S. Eliot* is as well-organized and well-mannered as the picture it gives of Eliot himself, and its form as intricate and self-enclosed as the form that so appealed to the poet of "The Hollow Men" and "The Four Quartets"—that of a multifoliate rose. Davie's *Ezra Pound,* on the other hand, is controversial, at times brilliant, at times barely comprehensible, in much the same manner his contemporaries have used to describe Pound the man; while its form is as seemingly chaotic, as given to dizzying reversals of logic as the form Pound took for *his* characteristic poetic configuration — the vortex.

It is always something of a disservice to treat one book alongside another because of the tendency to seem to be weighing them against one another, and there is no doubt that these two books in particular would be better served in separate reviews. Their radical dissimilarity intensifies the implied necessity of preferring one over the other. However we avoid distortion by adopting the attitude Pound once took in the debate over which of two poetic traditions (co-existing for a time in the English seventeenth century) constituted the "better" one. Refusing to choose, Pound insisted that "All the traditions are precious. They do not compete."

> *Eliot was different from either [Yeats or Pound] in being a poet who brought into consciousness, and into confrontation with one another, two opposite things: the spiritually negative character of the contemporary world and the spiritually positive character of past tradition.*
>
> —T.S. Eliot

The Spender book is described as "the best introduction to the poet yet published"—and it may very well be that—yet it is written with such a high order of intelligence and sympathetic understanding that it can be read with equal pleasure by the Eliot connoisseur. Spender's approach is to be as comprehensive as possible; he manages to give a sense of having knowledgeably sifted through the multiple texts already out on Eliot and to have set down in one convenient location, in admirable order, the best that has been thought and said on the subject. His own readings of the individual poems, plays and critical essays, while maximally useful (because representative of the mainstream, the orthodoxy of Eliot criticism) are nevertheless exceptionally fine, sympathetic and searching. And in addition to this full complement of critical evaluation, Spender gives us as well the modest number of facts available on Eliot's life—some from printed sources, others arising from his personal acquaintance with Eliot, who was his editor at Faber and Faber and who became his honored older friend.

The fact that Spender is himself a poet shows to advantage in the sure and convincing grasp he brings to the elements of craft. There is, for example, his gloss on the famous lines from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" in which the evening is described as "spread out against the sky/ Like a patient etherized upon a table." Spender notes that "one has only to substitute the word "anesthetized" for "etherized" to see how "anesthetized" would make the image rigid, anchored, grotesque. "Etherized" untethers it—makes it float, witty, dreaming."

He handles especially well the important and delicate question of Pound's collaboration on *The Waste Land,* giving a clear, well-documented picture of the nature and extent of Pound's help and summing it up by saying that "What Pound did essentially was to release the energy of the poem and suppress what was distracting superfluous, slovenly, or rhythmically or imagistically obstructive in it." As for the many cuts Pound advised, to most of which Eliot acceded, Spender concludes: "It is possible to regret the omission of some lines, but of remarkably few."

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Though largely suppressing his own personality in the service of his material, Spender adds a tonic twist to his critical interpretations upon occasion. Take, for example, this observation, prompted by his consideration of *The Cocktail Party:* "A problem for Eliot as a playwright is that for him the choice of eternity is so obviously preferable to that of life on this earth that it is difficult for him not to make actual living seem second-rate." He interpolates too some glimpses of Eliot's own rather mordant sense of humor, as when he recounts for us the time that Auden came upon Eliot engrossed in a game of Patience. Auden asked him why in the world the game appealed to him, and after a pause, received Eliot's thoughtful reply: "Well, I suppose it's because it's the nearest thing to being dead."

But neither his appreciation of Eliot's ironic wit nor his personal friendship with him prevent Spender from always being conscious that, behind the homburg and the furled umbrella Eliot affected in his disguise as a London City man, lay a sensibility with a Conradian awareness of "the horror, the horror" just under the surface of civilized life—a sort of double vision of superficial social calm and vast spiritual deserts co-existing in the real world.

He reminds us too of the considerable evidence which indicates that Eliot believed the end of Western civilization was impending. "In 1929," Spender reports, "when I myself as a very young man had lunch with him for the first time, I asked him what form he had thought the collapse would take. 'Internecine warfare,' he answered. Puzzled by this, I pressed him for a more precise answer. He said, 'People killing one another in the streets.' "

As for the questions that arise out of Eliot's criticism, Spender does not so much attempt to dispose of them as to display them, setting Eliot's views forth alongside opposing ones, of his own and others, so that what emerges is a well-rounded discussion of such issues as tradition versus modernity, tradition and the individual talent, the element of personality or impersonality in the poetic voice, and poetry and belief. The result is thorough, accurate and fair.

The Davie book is described as a "major study of the life and work" of Ezra Pound, a description which, in strict accuracy, requires some qualification. Its brilliance alone qualifies it for the epithet "major" though it would have to be understood to belong to some fairly advanced stage of sophistication in Pound scholarship; however, aside from the catalog of significant dates contained in the Biographical Note at the front, there is almost nothing in it of Pound's life. Davie's decisions about what to include and exclude from it seem to have been formed along entirely idiosyncratic lines, the consequence of which is to imbue his slender volume with a very odd perspective; in fact, it is quite dismaying to think of anyone relying upon it for their only impression of Ezra Pound.

In his initial chapter Davie is intent on placing the reputation of Pound critics of all persuasions in as damaging a light as possible, seemingly on the theory that we will afterward be less likely to take quite such a dim view of Pound's own. Consequently detractors and supporters alike are, one after the other, brought up before us for redresss of wrongs and for receipt of improving new versions of what Davie takes to be the true state of Pound's case. Although difficult to follow at times, this section of the book is always interesting and, up to a point, even convincing. Some sample Davie contentions: that Pound was not an iconoclastic crusader for the modern but a militant conservative, an Edwardian with a full pack of nineteenth century attitudes and enthusiasms. Not a modernist, then, but a traditionalist, whose "Make it new" did not mean "Make it new" after all, but rather "Keep the old vital."

In his second chapter Davie rightly identifies two main lines of critical

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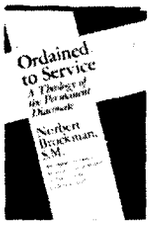

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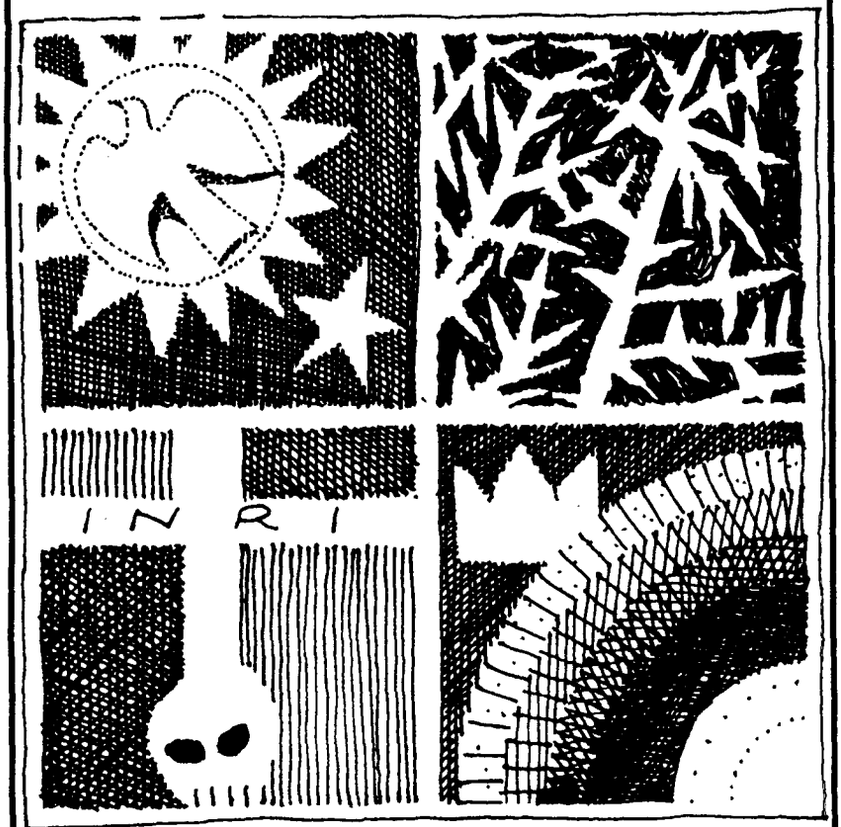

POLITICS AND THE BIBLICAL DRAMA

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attitudes about the poems themselves. In one camp are the critics who feel, like Dr. Leavis, that Pound's early work—culminating in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley"—was his best, and that his *Cantos* represent instances of regrettably idiosyncratic, perhaps even unbalanced fallings off of Pound's poetic and intellectual powers. Davie's own view is exactly the reverse; in fact he is harshly critical of much of the early work up to 1920, seeing it as a misguided attempt of Pound's to adapt talents best equipped for poetry that is mean to be sung to such classical genres as the epigram, the lampoon, and the epistle—all of which are intended for the spoken voice.

"Apart from anything else," remarks Davie, "these genres call for a sure grasp of social tone, whereas there is much evidence that Pound was socially maladroit. Accordingly . . . we find him painstakingly attempting . . . niceties of urbane insolence and Jamesian nuance such as he could not command." Davie includes the much-admired "Mauberley" in this contention—agreeing with Pound's own epithet for it that it is "thin," and reviling its champions with the suggestion that it appeals to them because they themselves are possessed of "thin and constricted and rancorously distrustful sensibilities."

Having left no doubt about which camp he is aligning himself with, Davie goes on, in the next chapter, to expatiate on his view that *The Cantos* —117 poems written at intervals from even before "Mauberley" and extending to the end of Pound's life—form the main body of Pound's poetic output and constitute a great literary achievement worthy of the reader's lifelong attention. This chapter, called "Ideas in *The Cantos*," displays Davie at his most maddening, which is to say his most tantalizing. The first thing he does about the ideas in *The Cantos* is to toss the really troublesome ones out of court. Oh, he describes them equably enough as consisting, in part, of the idea "that Usury is a vicious and desolating force in both public

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and private life . . . that international Jewry has played and continues to play such-and-such a part in its operations; that Mussolini, unlike Roosevelt, had a grasp of what usury was and had a practicable plan for containing and disinfecting it . . ."—He takes them and disposes of them by redefining them as "not ideas" at all but "opinions." Then, with the help of an obscure English thinker named Allen Upward (said to have had a great influence on Pound) he redefines the word "ideas" so that, when it occurs in *The Cantos* it means "stabs at," "aspirations toward things not yet real."

Perhaps it was the Upward influence in them that led Yvor Winters to complain that he came away from *The Cantos* without the assurance that he had any ideas at all, a criticism which Davie promptly usurps, turning it into praise of one of the poems' insufficiently recognized virtues. For, the way to appreciate *The Cantos,* he insists, is not necessarily to read them for comprehension, but principally for their rhythms which, when read properly—that is, fast and in great gulps, makes for a kind of creative bewilderment which Davie argues is better than comprehension.

"Exegesis will be resisted" he tells us at one point—quite unnecessarily, since we have been for some while witnessing his assiduous avoidance of it—this isn't because he *couldn't*, he hastens to assure us, and in fact he is quite tolerant to those who feel a need to supplement the great gulp method. Davie does not, he says, "deny that some teasing out of quite short excerpts, even some hunting of sources and allusions, is profitable at some stage." He is even tolerant (and these may safely be taken as the only two instances of critical tolerance in the volume) of those who find they cannot altogether abandon the usual grammatical concepts attaching to such forms as the past indicative which, Davie assures us cannot, in a *Canto* context, be assumed to mean what we expect it to mean in prose discourse. "Just here" he acknowledges, "is a parting of the ways: either we suppose that our grasp on cultural order, as reflected in our language, is too insecure for such departures as this to be tolerated, let alone emulated; or else, we do not. For my part, a decision either way—given that the person deciding has recognized just what is at issue—is equally honorable."

This is heady stuff (a jacket blurb tells us that Robert Lowell got vertigo from it, but he is said to have found it bracing all the same.) And there is more, for what Davie loves as much as he detests explication is technical metrical analysis, and in the section on the rhythmic features of *The Cantos* the anapests, the dactyls, the trochees and the iambs fly at us with no quarter given. Surprisingly, this turns out to be both dazzling and informative, though it may send us scurrying to Brooks and Warren for a quick refresher on the rules of scansion.

The Cantos is really an epic made up of blocks of history in the form of poetic rhythms, Davie informs us in this section, in an insight that certainly sounds far enough out to be his but which, though he doesn't say so, rather surprisingly originates with T. S. Eliot. Davie doesn't care much for Eliot; nevertheless Eliot sums up the theme of the whole chapter admirably when he states that the chief value of the poem lies in the fact that it is "an inexhaustible reference book of verse form." In a bravura display of this point, Davie shows that in it Pound has echoed the rhythms of the Greeks, of Ben Jonson, of Campion and Waller and Chaucer and, in fact, has found a way of both encapsulating

> *Many critics who would deny to Pound any other achievement have allowed him at least this one—that he had 'an ear,' that he truly could command a range of audible rhythms which only a liberation from the authority of the pentameter permitted him first, and his reader afterward, to recognize, positively* to hear.
>
> —Ezra Pound

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and revitalizing tradition by seeing it and using it as "rhythm working its way through history."

Before one aspect of their subjects Spender and Davie seem equally helpless—the unpalatable, even scandalous nature of the social and political philosophies Eliot and Pound are on record as holding, with greater or lesser degrees of vehemence, and which have often been described as both anti-Semitic and fascist.

Spender is reduced to personal testimonial—"in the thirty-five years of my acquaintance with him I never heard him utter an anti-Semitic remark."—and to maintaining that Eliot was too full of Christian virtue and too much a gentleman ever to have been a fascist.

Davie, faced with the double difficulty of Pound's more virulent anti-Semitism (the whole of his usury diatribe being intimately linked to the Jew as money-lender) as well as his open advocacy of Mussolinian fascism, is ever harder pressed. What he does is emphasize some remarks that Pound is quoted as having made in interviews at the end of his life and some lines from late poems in which he describes himself as "not a demigod," as a man whose "errors and wrecks lie about me" and, again, as a man possessed of "Many errors, a little rightness." He gives special weight to Pound's remark that "the worst mistake I made was that stupid, suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism." Finally Davie's attempt to find mitigation for Pound is two-pronged. He both urges that Pound be given full credit for these evidences of

ELECTING THE MESSIAH

JOHN GARVEY

I have been trying to figure out what bothers me about the preachers who have been cropping up on television lately. There has been an increase in fundamentalist programming around here in recent months, and it is apparently a nationwide phenomenon. As the hosts of these programs exult about "this great Christian ministry" I find myself getting the creeps.

It isn't that I can't find room in my heart for evangelical Christianity. I've heard sermons done by evangelical ministers which were genuine calls to repentance and conversion. They weren't done in a style I'm comfortable with; my comfort, however, is obviously not what the Gospel was designed for.

But there are discomforts, and then there are embarrassments. When a churchgoer hears and takes to heart an uncomfortable part of the Gospel, a statement like "he who seeks his life will lose it," or "sell all you have, give it to the poor, and follow me," he is profoundly unsettled. That's part of the message. But when he finds himself looking at a preacher who lays molasses around the name of Jesus and is decked out like Johnny Carson in a flashy suit and razor-cut hair, I don't think it is the stark message of the Gospel which makes him uncomfortable; there's something else at work. And we react with the same embarrassment to Billy Graham's golf course ministry and Jimmy Carter's humorless soul-bearing. There is in this style a blinkered earnestness which will do *everything* to make itself loved, a narrowly focused Christianity which tries too hard to reassure all of us unsaved that you can be a Christian and a regular fellow.

But there is something beyond the embarrassment. As unecumenical as this is, it has to be said: it isn't just the style, but the religion itself which disturbs me.

Here are a couple of examples: one of the TV evangelists opened his show not long ago with a gleeful yell to the studio audience, "OK, everybody, how many here are SAVED? I want to see hands . . ." and there they were, an eager forest of arms raised and wriggling, like grade school all over again. A couple of grim-looking men who had probably been dragged along by their wives sat with their arms solidly folded, and God bless them both. Another time a member of one of the "Jews for Jesus" groups spoke about how in these latter days the Holy Spirit was being poured out everywhere, even on the Jews, and he told of a man who was in the synagogue when "the word of the Lord came to him" and what the word of the Lord said was, "Salvation is not to be found in this place." On other evangelical shows you see bright-eyed people who are confident that Israeli victories are signs of the imminent return of Christ. Other signs of the end are a decline in morals (morals usually means sex, dirty language, drugs and a lack of respect for authority), any outbreak of armed hostility and, of course, the spread of fundamentalism.

There were enthusiastic religious outbreaks in the decades preceding the year 1000. It is mildly exciting to watch the odometer of your car move from 1999 to 2000; a similar superstitious regard for the calendar draws wild excitement from people waiting for the millennial zero-flip. While this is behind some of the current fundamentalism, it is far from the only thing. There is also a terrible need for *feeling certain*, for an experienced reassurance that you are right and they are wrong. The substance of the religious claim means less, in practice, than the feeling that it is true. There is a great distance between an honest search for truth —with all of its darkness and long periods of unknowing—and the feel-

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partial recanting and at the same time, in subtle ways, manages to suggest that the really culpable party behind Pound's evil positions is America.

Perhaps no more eloquent testimony could be found to the stubbornly intractable nature of this shadow across Eliot's and Pound's accomplishments than the signal failure of both Spender and Davie adequately to meet and explain it. Both maintain that there can be no ncessary connection between the eminence of that poetic accomplishment and the elitist philosophies Eliot and Pound so conspicuously shared; yet both Spender and Davie recognize a definite connection between the commitment to a hierarchical view of society *of some kind*, and the perpetuation of a literary culture in its recognized form.

Spender, long active on the British Socialist left, at one point even enlists Orwell in defense of Eliot's *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (their common ground being a mutual skepticism over the value of any culture a communist state could provide). And Davie points out that while "there can be no doubt that Pound *did* believe in a social hierarchy," in Davie's view, "we may suspect any enthusiast for a literary civilization must." He sums up the all-encompassing nature of the problems involved by noting that "Pound's significance . . . may be thought to turn therefore on what we understand by 'a literary civilization'; whether we want any more of it; and, supposing we do, what chance we stand of getting it in any future that we can foresee."

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ing that you are in possession of the truth. This distance is ignored.

There is a liberal way of looking at the current religious enthusiasms which seems to me completely false. That is, the notion that because the hopes of the sixties were "betrayed," we have retreated in our disillusionment to a purely personal approach to life, a naturally fertile ground for religion. The falseness lies in the assumption that during the sixties our hopes were honest and clear, and not another version of the thing people are doing now with fundamentalist religion on the one hand and broader religious or psychological therapies on the other. All of these enthusiasms involve a projection which was never really very political or religious in the first place. It has to do with boredom, restlessness, rootlessness; it is a reaction to the meaninglessness we feel when we have anything to do with our political, religious, or social institutions. The reaction leads us to a passionate and wrongheaded hope that by transfusing our own energy into politics, or religious belief, or our sex lives, we can make them live, like Frankenstein waiting for lightning to make the damned stitched-up corpse twitch again.

This doesn't apply only to the extremes of religious or political behavior in America but to the mainstream as well, and it is especially apparent during an election year. Jimmy Carter places his autobiography with a religious publishing house (*Why Not the Best?*, Broadman, $1.95) and Logos International has published the incredibly named *The Miracle of Jimmy Carter* (Howard Norton and Bob Slosser, Logos, $1.95). The need to believe triumphs over the substance offered for veneration here as in the case of fundamentalist religion. So Jimmy Carter, a hawk right to the end of the Vietnam War, a mourner in Calley's cortege, says "Trust me." And some people do! They even vote to put him in power. There were people who were similarly moved by Nixon's "Bring us together." Few commentators bothered to recognize—or acknowledge the recognition, anyway—that Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country" was a profoundly anti-democratic statement, one which would make Jefferson spin in his grave, because the question Kennedy didn't want asked is precisely the right one, and his alternative is fascist—none of these things gets faced. The reason is that we don't want a president, a chief executive; we want a Holy King, a Leader, a Messiah.

This need for being led, without any evidence that the person we are willing to have lead us can zip up his pants, much less do anything decent for the country, is more moody than it is political. So people who defend their political choices are likely to speak of a *sense* of this, a *belief* in that, a *hope* for the other. The candidate's actual performance (Nixon's previous dirty tricks, Carter's hawkishness, Ford's blundering) are all less important than the way they make you *feel*. This not only lets hired image-makers get away with murder; it leads inevitably to disappointment. No leader is capable of "bringing us together" or "restoring the faith of people in government" (should it be restored, given what we know about government?) or of "binding up the nation's wounds." This Florence Nightingale *cum* Jesus picture is disgusting, and even more disgusting than the politicians' willingness to hawk it is the willingness of so many people to buy it.

Caveat emptor apparently doesn't work in American politics. The same is true of American religion, and this is where they converge: whatever they do on the practical level, they succeed through appeals to feeling, the need for certainty and a glowing missionary righteousness. Growing voter apathy, insofar as it is a refusal to accept the choices offered, is probably a good thing. "What hope is there, then?" ask the certainty junkies? "None" is the right answer at this point, given the choices we are forced to swallow. Years ago one old lady was asked why she didn't vote, and her answer is perfect for this year. "It only encourages them," she said.

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Finally—and, I suppose, ironically, in view of the insistence on the part of all four poets concerned in these volumes that poetry is a province unto itself, inviolate from external considerations of value and belief—one cannot come away from a reading of either *T.S. Eliot* or *Ezra Pound* without being reminded anew that the person who undertakes to involve himself seriously in poetry—whether as poet or reader—had better be prepared to deal with much larger questions as well.

Ordinary People

JUDITH GUEST

Viking, $7.95

STEVEN KROLL

Incredible as it may seem, Americans remain obsessed by suburbia. Two decades after *The Organization Man*, the goal for so many of us remains the comfortable three bedroom house, the clipped lawn, the two-car garage, the white picket fence. The shopping centers spread their blight across the land, and after polite murmurs of objection, everyone just goes and shops in them.

But as Americans everywhere have continued to embrace the suburb, writers of fiction have continued to denounce it. There was the tired cynicism of Updike's *Couples*, and then, with *Rabbit Redux*, there was paunchy Rabbit Angstrom, stuck in a failing marriage and development living, unable to move in any direction. In Joseph Heller's *Something Happened*, Bob Slocum floundered in the wreckage of his suburban life. And in John Cheever's *Bullet Park*, Tony Nailles, child of the suburbs, woke up one morning, felt "terribly sad," and didn't get out of bed for a few weeks.

Each of these suburban domestic novels had a larger dimension, as well as a personally critical one. At the end of *Couples* the local church burned down, but the golden weathercock was saved. In *Rabbit Redux*, Rabbit was caught between stoned youth and black anger, and the book was electric with the fear and rage of the late sixties. In *Something Happened*, Bob Slocum, drowning in his own words, adrift from feeling, became an archetype. In *Bullet Park*, Tony Nailles had to escape crucifixion—Hammer against Nailles—and then, with exquisite irony, "everything was as wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful as it had been."

These larger dimensions gave the novels greater weight, and appealed to the symbolic American imagination. But when, I wondered through them all, when would a writer come along who had no such grander view and no personally critical one either, a writer who would accept the suburb as our way of life and find little fault with it? Judith Guest's first novel, *Ordinary People*, does just that.

Which is not to say that *Ordinary People* is a bad book. It is, most emphatically, a good one, full of crisp, clear writing, real characters coping with real situations, and a genuine sense of place. It is a novel that draws you in and draws you along, and it is best at depicting those terrible frustrations—those derailed intentions and misplaced remarks—that complicate all our lives. Still, there are aspects of this novel that are genuinely disturbing in their limited perspective.

First, consider Conrad Jarrett and his father. Con Jarrett stands at the center of *Ordinary People*. As the book opens, he is going on eighteen and barely a month out of a mental hospital. The summer before last, he and his older brother Buck had been in a sailing accident on Lake Michigan. Light-hearted, confident Buck had drowned. Con had blamed himself without reason, had known he would be punished, had given up on school and himself and finally cut his wrists.

Now he is trying to struggle back, to connect with people. He must learn that sometimes no one is at fault, that punishment isn't around every corner, that forgiveness is not an impossibility. Most important, he must learn, from his hip psychiatrist and from a school romance, that the ability to feel is worth much more than the ability to control your feelings.

All of which Con's father must learn as well. An Evanston, Illinois, tax attorney, Calvin Jarrett grew up in an orphanage in Detroit. Faced with the responsibilities of a fatherhood, he has become overprotective, all bound up in those questions of control, fault, forgiveness. It is the legacy of Puritanism all over again (how close does Calvin come to Calvinism?), and we must learn to conquer it through love.

But how, in the midst of their struggles, can Conrad and Calvin Jarrett never question their suburban values? How, in fact, can Con try so hard to reaffirm them? Toward the beginning, standing in his parents' Lake Forest driveway, "He wants to belong to this house again, needs to be part of these

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REVIEWERS

JANET GROTH is a member of the editorial staff of the *New Yorker*.

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tall windows set low to the ground, walls half-hidden behind thick waxy rhododendron leaves, the cedar hedge in front, all of it—all elegance and good taste." A moment later he will question his sense of identity, but he'll dislike the LeMans he gets for Christmas only because he sees it as a bribe.

And then there is his mother. Beth is a cool, distant, selfish woman intent on appearances. She is incapable of feeling, has no forgiveness in her, seems the perfect product of her surroundings. And yet, at the end, when she has left them, father and son still vainly hope that love will bring her home.

It is difficult to rationalize these drawbacks in an otherwise polished, attractive, absorbing book. *Ordinary People* gives a true, uncritical picture of life in suburbia. It will be popular because—fortunately or unfortunately—so many people can identify with the "ordinary" characters. But greater insight and a broader perspective might have produced a bolder result.

Against the World, For The World: The Hartford Appeal and the Future of American Religion

EDITED BY PETER BERGER & RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS

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Freedom Made Flesh: The The Mission of Christ and His Church

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CHARLES DAVIS

I found it difficult to focus the discomfort I felt with the style of the Hartford Appeal until I came across the comment of Luke Salm, cited by Carl Peter in the present volume of essays on the Appeal by eight of its signers. Luke Salm remarked that the Appeal was "too reminiscent of the generalizations that characterized Roman pronouncements in the past." Yes, that was it. I was back again in that atmosphere I had almost forgotten of vague condemnations, tendentiously worded "errors," diffuse anxiety about "modern thought" and reproaches against over-accommodating, novelty-seeking theologians.

The style is one that precludes reasonable discourse—for which ironically the Hartford signers appeal. In both the Roman case (I am thinking of such documents as *Humani Generis* and *Mysterium Fidei*) and the Hartford case the lack of specific references is defended on grounds of charity, namely the desire not to condemn any writer personally. But the effect is to insulate the negative judgments from any argued attack for reasons of misunderstanding, neglect of context or unfair caricature. It stirs up a distrust which the suspects have no means of dissipating.

But Rome at least was not afraid of counter-affirmation and, further, it was always possible to reconstruct the classicist theology which caused the fear of modern thought. The Hartford signers composed an appeal for theological

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affirmation that does not itself affirm anything theologically and is capable of contradictory interpretations according to the context in which it is placed. Its lack of precise theological content makes it an instance of the disease it deplores.

The Hartford Appeal itself, I repeat, does not allow reasonable discourse, because any pointed comment, whether positive or negative, can be rebuffed by saying that it does not meet its intention. However, the present volume of commentaries by some of its signers enables one to select some observations for discussion.

Peter Berger sees the Appeal as responding to "a widespread loss of transcendence," and Avery Dulles in turn speaks of "the rampant immanentism, humanism, secularism, psychologism, sociologism of our age—a convergent movement that leaves no room for the transcendent." The question, then, arises: Is the loss of transcendence the cause of the present weakness of Christian faith and theology?

I myself would attribute the decline of religious faith and the absence of an assured theology to a loss of immanence and a false concept of transcendence. The order of the day should not be a direct emphasis upon transcendence, which in the present situation would simply be misunderstood and reinforce the false transcendence that plagues religious thinking and practice. More to the point is to meet the superficiality of modern culture by a stress on the depths immanent in every area of human experience.

Various factors combined to destroy the sense of divine immanence in the world: the rise of the empirical method and its subsequent dominance over human thought and culture, the related empiricist philosophy, the dualist philosophy of Descartes, the abstract reason of the French Enlightenment. God, banished from the world and subjects, became purely an object, and his transcendence was supposedly secured by removing him to an infinite distance beyond other objects. He became less and less accessible and was increasingly deprived of any meaningful relationship to the world of men. Eventually he disappeared over the horizon. The later stages of the process as reflected in literature have been admirably described by J. Hills Miller in his two books, *The Disappearance of God* and *Poets of Reality*.

Much of what passes for transcendence and otherworldliness in religion and theology is the distorted counterpart of the positivism and objectivism of the dominant culture. Despite all the clumsiness and exaggeration accompanying it, the worldly turn of faith and theology, the emphasis upon secular and political concerns, is a reaction in the right direction. Of its nature, the recovery of divine immanence can be achieved only by embracing the world of men in its concrete, imperfect reality and working to transform it from within. It cannot be done by adding another supposedly transcendent world.

Though disavowed, a suspicion of dualism has hung over the Hartford Appeal. A remark in the essay of Richard Neuhaus does for me reveal a latent dualism. He observes that "many Christians do not believe in that universe of discourse that transcends all movements and universes of discourse." Surely, this is a demand for a purely religious discourse; and consequently for a religious realm set apart from the world of ordinary life. Sacred and secular are in this conception related extrinsically not intrinsically. The very title of the book, "Against the World For the World" puts the world over there, apart from us Christians, an object of either fear or concern. But according to a genuine transcendence God and the world are not distinct as two finite objects nor as object and subject; the world is not apart from God or outside God. For that reason there can be no demarcated religious sphere. Expressly sacred ritual or language is but an element in religion. Religious faith and love embrace every human concern. Human concerns are intrinsic to religion and vice-versa.

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to both the European political theology and the Latin American theology of liberation with their stress on political and social involvement as the necessary expression of Christian faith today. I cannot, however, praise Ignacio Ellacuria's *Freedom Made Flesh,* latest Latin American contribution in translation. The book to me shows how far off the track the Hartford Appeal is in its diagnosis of the present weakness of Christian faith and witness. What is lacking in the book is not theological affirmation, which is there in plenty. The defect is rather that the theology is not brought into an intrinsic relation with an empirical, secular analysis of the concrete situation. For me the book represents the airy, insubstantial quality of theological thinking when it does not accommodate itself to the methodological demands of modern thought. Divine immanence will not be restored to the modern world until that world is comprehended from within with every available resource. We are given instead in this book a mystifying transcendence sprayed from without upon a humanly pressing situation.

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Abigail McCarthy (Cont.)

(Continued from page 710)

vince exiles of the total absence of asylum—that they were safe nowhere.

The official theory of the junta is that the bomb was placed by hard-line international Communists who thought Orlando Letelier too centrist, too committed to the constitution of Chile which had originally made the Allende election possible. That, too, could be possible.

What concerns us most is what our government does to find out. We cannot continue to live with the feeling that our powers that be are indifferent to assassins crossing our borders, hunting down their prey with impunity. Too many Americans accept, quite calmly, the possibility of connivance on the part of people in our own agencies. It is quite true, as Senator Kennedy said on the floor of the Senate, that the present administration embraced the junta, that the President said that the forcible change in Chile's governent was in the best interest of the people, that American business and our busy purveyors of arms like dealing with the junta.

And it is a government which has caused people to disappear, which did not hesitate to imprison Orlando Letelier, a cabinet minister who had been constitutionally appointed, a man only recently an accredited ambassador to our United States. It is a government which uses torture Orlando Letelier had made notes about his "interrogation."

"But a human being is a very extraordinary thing, sometimes you are able to face things that perhaps, if you were asked about those things before, you would say, 'No, I'm not prepared for those things.' But the feeling of being convinced that your most important task is to be alive, gives you a lot of courage . . . to say every day, 'My task is to be alive. I am not going to allow the fascists to destroy me.' And that helps."

Now he is not alive. That is a monstrous fact. Is there any hope that enough of us can be alive to the cancer of injustice in the world, the hatred of life, which made his death, and that of others seem logical and mandatory to someone—someone safe among us?

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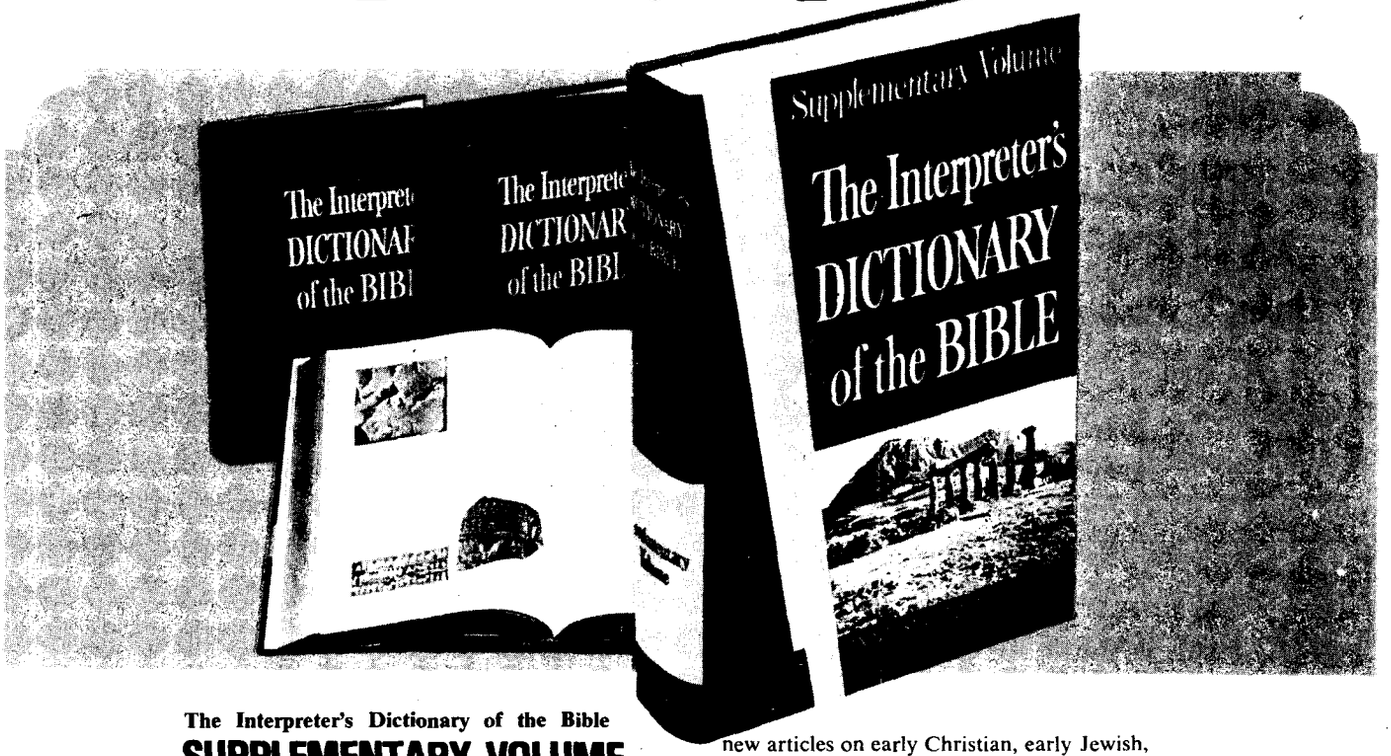

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